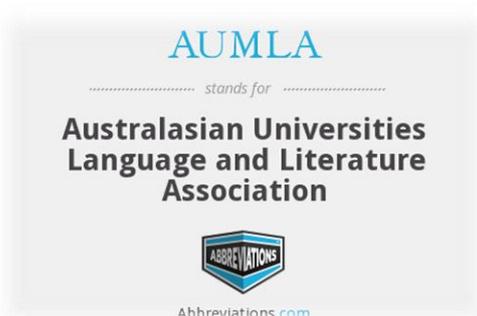


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New Materialism and the Stuff of Humanism

By **Kay Anderson** and **Colin Perrin**

Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2016.

We live in a world that is, and of course always has been, shared with nonhumans. Given the urgency of our current ecological situation, how then can we challenge the idea—indeed the conceit—that humans are in some sense *irreducible* to nature? It is this formidably tenacious, and in the early decades of the twenty-first century patently dangerous, idea that this paper takes up. And it does so against the background of a widespread, and now increasingly ‘materialist’ concern within the humanities (and social sciences) to move beyond the legacy of a narrow, humanist conception of culture as something separate from, and elevated above, the natural world. Countering the idea that humans occupy a separate and privileged place among other beings has, of course, been the central goal of a now well-established post-humanist agenda: an agenda inspired above all, perhaps, by Bruno Latour (see, for example, *Politics of Nature*). And this paper shares the ambition of scholars working across a range of disciplines to ‘decentre ... the thinking human subject’ (Hawkins and Potter 37). Here, however, we want to question the way in which this ambition has been taken up, in cultural studies as well as elsewhere, in accordance with what the geographer Sarah Whatmore has referred to as a ‘recuperation of materiality’ (*Hybrid Geographies* 602).

Cultural theory has evidently turned away from its former interest in how the world is represented and interpreted by human beings. As the editors of a recent book on new materialism and the arts write: ‘The matter of the world can no longer be a mere resource’ for human thought and activity (Bolt 3). For Stephen Muecke, it is in an explicit rejection of ‘the idea that the world is a passive resource for use by active humans’ that “‘things” have taken a decidedly material turn’ (‘An Experiment’ 453; see also, for example, Bennett and Joyce; Coole and Frost; Dolphijn and van der Tuin). In particular, it is in the elaboration of what Jane Bennett calls an ‘ecology of matter’—taken up for example in the study of so-called naturecultures (see Hawkins and Potter)—that matter itself has come to be understood as a vital force (Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*), and culture reconceptualised as a material entanglement of humans and nonhumans (Bennett, ‘Force of Things’).

Noting, in Bennett’s words, this ‘attempt ... to present human and nonhuman actants on a less vertical plane than is common’ (*Vibrant Matter* ix), here we take our point of departure, not from the rich diversity of efforts across many disciplinary fields to acknowledge the ‘agency’ of

nonhumans (see, for example, Sayes) or the force of 'affect' in human-nonhuman entanglements (see, for example, Latimer and Miele). Instead, and acknowledging the paradox of what might—although only at first—be construed as a focus on the 'all-too-human', our own attention is directed towards those human actants whose existence must also be considered on a 'less vertical plane'. More specifically, this paper considers how the elaboration of a 'monist' (Dolphijn and van der Tuin 86) conception of culture-as-material has tended to foreclose an engagement—and indeed a materialist engagement—with what Bruce Braun has called the 'particular figuration' of the human as something more than a human animal (1352). For it is this engagement, we want to argue, that is crucial if the still insistent claim that humans are exceptional is to be rigorously confronted rather than just condemned and dismissed.

Seeking to attend to 'the distinctive capacities or efficacious powers of particular material configurations', Bennett herself explicitly brackets off 'the question of the human and ... the literature on subjectivity', strategically eliding 'what is commonly taken as distinctive or even unique about humans' (*Vibrant Matter* ix). This strategy aims to clear the way for a new materialist account of human-nonhuman interaction, beyond the humanist assumption that agency is an exclusively human attribute. Bennett does not, however, settle for the prospect of empirically repudiating this assumption. The 'philosophical project of ... subjectivity', she adds, 'is too often bound up with fantasies of human uniqueness in the eyes of God, of escape from materiality, or of mastery of nature' (ix). Here, then, the strategy of bracketing off 'the question of the human' from that flatter conception of culture now being advanced across various new materialisms is supported by the contention that those qualities commonly regarded as differentiating and elevating humans from nonhumans are mere fantasies.

This characterisation of humanism has come to constitute a critical orthodoxy for those who reject the conceit that humans are exceptional. As John Gray writes, the still dominant 'fantasy'—he too uses this word—that 'we are not like other animals' is no more than 'a secular religion thrown together from decaying scraps of Christian myth' (31). It is this claim that human exceptionalism is an essentially theological belief—and one that has, as Lynn White argued in his influential paper 'The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis', remained a constant 'despite Darwin' (1205)—which has informed a more general new materialist rejection of humanism.

As a kind of enduring fantasy, the idea of human exceptionalism is usually traced—more or less directly—from Christian ideas about the soul, through Descartes' mind-body dualism, and on to more recent conceptions of culture as a distinct realm of human agency. As Erica Fudge has noted, Descartes is normally taken to be 'the poster boy for current representations of humanist ideas' (182). But this is precisely insofar as he is understood as having 'fused the Christian concept of an eternal soul (the image of God in

humanity) with the more secular concept of the rational mind' (Peterson 38). So, whether traced to Christian doctrine or to Cartesian dualism, new materialism sets itself against the conception of the 'thinking [human] subject ... as *ontologically other than matter*' (Coole and Frost 8). The 'monism' advocated by the editors of the recent collection *New Materialism: Interviews and Cartographies* is, for example, explicitly opposed to 'Cartesian dualism' (Dolphijn and van der Tuin 86). Similarly, it is with reference to what he calls an 'inescapably theological' idea of mind—conceived as an '*immaterial* substance'—that the cultural theorist Richie Nimmo rejects a humanist understanding of culture. For him, this understanding of culture is described as 'Cartesian "mind" collectivized' (3, our emphasis).

It is, then, according to a classical ontological dualism—in which the defining characteristic of the human (as essentially immaterial) is separated from the nonhuman (defined as irremediably material)—that humanism has come to be understood as an 'immaterialism'. Identified with the belief that the human mind is ontologically distinct (and not—as for materialism generally—simply reducible to biology), human exceptionalism is rejected as escapist fantasy. What we want to argue here, however, is that this critique of humanism constitutes something of a blind spot for the claim—which we share—that 'everything is material' (Coole and Frost 9). For if *everything* is material, wouldn't the 'fantasy' of human exceptionality also have to be considered a 'material configuration'? And, as such, wouldn't *its* 'distinctive capacities or efficacious powers' need to be treated as a 'worldly'—rather than an 'otherworldly'—construction?

Succinctly, if everything is material, if, that is, there is *only* the material, then this must also be the case for 'what is commonly taken as distinctive or even unique about humans'. The 'immaterial' soul or mind cannot, therefore, just be dismissed, as if the materiality of everything somehow meant that souls or minds—in their 'immateriality'—were non-existent. Indeed, it is precisely this mode of ontological critique—as it aims to oppose 'the real' to 'the unreal', or 'the true' to 'the false'—that Latour, like Foucault before him, rejects. As Foucault maintained in his own critique of ideology: 'the problem does not consist in drawing the line between that in a discourse which falls under the category of scientificity or truth, and that which comes under some other category, but in seeing historically how effects of truth are produced within discourses which in themselves are neither true nor false' (119). Similarly for Latour—and in addressing the relationship between science and religion—'knowledge' is not to be opposed to 'belief', but rather both have to be understood as the product of 'empirically graspable chains of translations' belonging to 'two different regimes' ('Coming Out' 600).

Clearly, then, new materialism's rejection of humanism as a mere belief is somewhat at odds with the now widespread recognition that ideas are no

less material, are no less real, than things (see Law). It is not, therefore, a matter of rejecting humanism because it is 'constructed'. Rather, insisting on the materiality of this constructedness, here we follow Foucault's and Latour's subversion of this type of critique. For, as soon as it is acknowledged that everything shares the same ontological status, the fact *that* things are constructed is no longer of critical importance. Rather, the crucial issue becomes *how* things are constructed. As Latour puts it, the key questions are then: 'How well designed is it? How solidly constructed is it? How durable or reliable is it (according, that is, to the criteria of the discursive regime to which it belongs)?' (*Reassembling the Social* 89). It is, therefore, in extending the insight that 'everything is material' to humanism itself that our aim here is to 'open up' the (radically ventured yet profoundly under-examined) thesis of human exceptionalism, in order to see precisely how it has been assembled; to see—as Latour writes of Foucault's analyses of power—'the tiny ingredients from which [it] is made' (*Reassembling the Social* 86). It is, therefore, in the recognition of its materiality that humanism can be seen, not as a fixed and unchanging doctrine; but rather as a shifting and contingent configuration of ideas, practices and technologies that—for this very reason—is susceptible to being configured otherwise.

* * *

Our concern here with new materialism's critique of humanism arises in an ecological context that has seen a renewed commitment to the idea that humans possess a unique capacity to control their environment. Clive Hamilton, for example, has called attention to what he calls the 'techno fix of geo-engineering' (200): attempts to address the threat of ecological catastrophe via grand technological intervention, such as obstructing solar radiation with space-based mirrors; or, in Australia, covering endangered coral reefs with shade cloth and using electrical currents to stimulate their growth (Pearlman). What Latour refers to as the 'hubris' of such current reassertions of human ingenuity in the face of ecological catastrophe ('Will Non-humans be Saved?' 5) indeed warrants scrutiny. What, though, is the basis of this reinvigorated commitment to the idea that, in Gray's words, 'humans can free themselves from the limits that frame the lives of other animals' (4)?

As Nikolas Rose and Joelle M. Abi-Rached have pointed out, 'for at least the past century' humanism has been premised on the argument 'that human beings are *freed* from their biology *by virtue of that biology*' (2). And, even though the unique 'mental' abilities of humans still provide the basis for contemporary claims of human distinctiveness, it is in *physical*, rather than metaphysical, terms that these abilities have tended to be accounted for by today's human exceptionalists. Kenan Malik, for example, argues that it is in our very nature as human to transcend nature ('Materialism' 2). Raymond Tallis—a prominent critic of the claim that we are merely human animals—

also states that 'we humans have transcended our biology' (6). These exceptionalist claims are explicitly distinguished from the theological position that we were 'created by a separate process, and in the image of the creator of the universe' (Tallis 45). Tallis, for example, insists that his own position owes nothing to 'a belief in Cartesian dualism, or the notion that we are immaterial ghosts in the material machine of the mind or the body' (11). Rather, for him too, 'we are all products of natural processes' (45). And, as such, what he, along with other contemporary humanists, proposes is 'a biological explanation of how it is that we have taken a unique path' (228-9).

In distinctly post-Cartesian terms, Tallis's own account of 'how we came to be fundamentally different from other creatures' is traced to the uniqueness of human anatomy (214). Recalling an argument that—as we will indicate—can be traced back to the comparative anatomy of the early nineteenth century, Tallis's account hinges on the observation that 'Although other animals assume the upright position from time to time, only man is overwhelmingly bipedal' (216). It is, he argues, this 'upright position [that] liberates our hands' (211). He then proposes that human cultural development may be understood as 'a dialectic or a ratcheting up between brain and hand such that increasing dexterity would drive increasing brain size' and, in turn, 'the latter would promote increasing dexterity' (226).

As Tallis goes on to note, most explanations of human uniqueness tend to be based more exclusively 'on the fact that we have bigger brains' (215). In this respect, the claim of today's human exceptionalists that humanity has been successful in impacting the wider world is regularly linked to an argument that 'the size and complexity of the brain have evolved more rapidly in humans than ... in any other species, including apes' (Starr). The neuroscientist, V. S. Ramachandran, for example, writes: 'Although humans are apes, we are still ... something unique ... unprecedented ... transcendent ...' (4). 'Any ape can reach for a banana', he tells us, 'but only humans can reach for the stars' (4). Again, though, for Ramachandran, as for Tallis, the argument that 'the human ... is indeed unique and distinct from that of the ape by a huge mental gap ... is entirely compatible with [the] claim that we are biological' (12). Finally, Marilyn Robinson—in her recent critique of the 'para-scientific' reduction of humans to animals in fields such as evolutionary psychology and socio-biology—asks: 'What grounds can there be for doubting that a sufficient biological account of the brain would yield the complex phenomenon we know and experience as mind?' (119). She then continues to argue—and in direct opposition to a dualist ontology—that 'the mind, like the body, is very much placed in the world' (112).

In the context of these contemporary humanist arguments, can it really be the case—as Latour himself has contended—that 'we haven't moved an inch since Descartes' (*Pandora's Hope* 8)? That, five hundred or so years later, and as Latour goes on to lament, 'the [human] mind is still in its vat,

excised from the rest, disconnected, and contemplating ... the world' (8)? As if some idea of human exception from nature had just persisted, again 'despite Darwin', and as if the idea of human exceptionalism had simply endured throughout—or even outside of—history, as some archaic and vain metaphysical belief? Or some naïve theological delusion?

As we have argued more fully elsewhere, at the very beginning of the nineteenth century, metaphysical arguments for human exceptionality were rejected and replaced by an account of the physical distinctiveness of human beings (Anderson and Perrin). It was following the *demise* of theological accounts of the human, and what was considered to be its exalted place in the so-called great chain of beings, that—as Rose and Abi-Rached note—a new, biological, idea of human exceptionality was elaborated. Anticipating the arguments of those such as Robinson and Tallis, the comparative anatomists of the period elaborated an explicitly scientific—and, indeed, materialist—account of human exceptionality. It was, moreover, an account that was explicitly opposed to what the English anatomist William Lawrence—writing in 1819—called 'immaterialism', and so to the dualist assumption that the mind existed apart from the body. 'Where', Lawrence asked, 'is one to find proof of the mind's independence of the bodily structure? Of that mind, which, like the corporeal frame, is infantile in the child, manly in the adult, sick or debilitated in disease, frenzied or melancholic in the madman, enfeebled in the decline of life, doting in decrepitude, and annihilated by death?' (7).

The details of this shift in ideas about human exceptionality lie well beyond the scope and focus of this article. Our purpose here is clarified, however, by a brief summary of the discursive and political manoeuvres at stake in a shift whose very historicity we wish to highlight for our more conceptual purposes. In short, it was by linking the uniquely upright nature of the human body to the shape of the human head that anatomists such as Lawrence, and before him Georges Cuvier in France, sought to develop a biological account of human uniqueness. It was precisely in the attempt to demonstrate that human mentality was a product of bodily structure—and so, again, in order to avoid invoking any ontological separation between mind and body—that a scientific interest in the head arose, and with it the notorious craniometric practice of measuring human skulls from across the major world regions. The verticality of the human head was understood as indicating the relative size and dominance of the brain—in Cuvier's words, 'the instrument by which the mind reflects and thinks'—over the 'animal' senses of smell and taste, identified with the nose and mouth (4). And it was in the extremely elaborate and unstable effort to correlate variations in head shape with the 'known' mental abilities of certain peoples—above all, those of different 'races', but also acknowledged 'geniuses' and 'idiots' (see Hecht)—that a physiological idea of intelligence was forged (Blanckaert 437; see also Williams). Understood as a mental capacity that varied between

human beings, intelligence was nevertheless considered to be qualitatively different in *all* beings that walked upright. For if, as Cuvier maintained, 'intelligence ... is in constant proportion to the relative size of the brain' (30), this was, for him, quite literally because 'the more *elevated* the nature of the animal, the more voluminous is the brain' (25; our emphasis).

This shift from theology to biology *within* humanist discourse presents an obvious empirical challenge to the assumption that a notion of human exceptionalism has remained more or less constant (at least) since Descartes. But what this post-Cartesian shift in humanist discourse poses, we want to suggest, is not fundamentally an historical, but rather a theoretical, challenge to the current mode of new materialist rejection of humanism.

To claim—as, for example, Lynn White does—that although 'the forms of our thinking and language have largely ceased to be Christian', their substance has not (1205), amounts not to a demonstration of the continuity of human exceptionalism itself; but rather, we suggest, to a presumption of its constancy. Shifts between Christian or Cartesian and contemporary ideas of human exceptionalism—not to mention the impact of later nineteenth-century debates around evolution—cannot just be assimilated to a singular historical trajectory, as if the history of human exceptionalism could be understood as nothing more than variations of the same humanist doctrine; and so as if this doctrine itself could be considered as just persisting 'behind' its various articulations. Following Latour, the latter cannot be adequately understood as mere 'intermediaries' for some 'force or meaning' they need only 'transport' (*Reassembling the Social* 39); which is to say that biological accounts of human exceptionalism cannot be adequately understood as mere 'ideological arguments posturing as matters of fact' ('Why has Critique Run Out of Steam' 227). In this respect, to construe humanism as somehow existing apart from, and before, its specific instantiations is to separate out some ahistorical *idea* of humanism from those very instantiations. It is, then, precisely to abstract humanism from the material.

The crucial point we want to make here, therefore, is not simply that new materialism has missed the historical shift in humanist discourse from theology to biology. Rather, it misses the fact that humanism is not just now, but *always was*—to use Bennett's phrase—'a material configuration'. It always had to be 'assembled', to be materially constructed. What becomes clear, then, is that 'the immaterial' itself must be seen as another kind of 'material' out of which humanism has been made. Again, humanism is not only now, but *always was*, a thing of this world. Here, therefore, we can discern a certain slippage in the new materialist critique, which dismisses humanism as if it were made of different ontological stuff. And it is a slippage that Latour himself—in his defence of a literal (which is to say, a

materialist) constructivism against its discursive or linguistic counterpart ('Why has Critique Run Out of Steam' 227)—can help to clarify.

Latour argues that what is 'constructed' cannot be taken as 'artificial, contrived ... and false', as opposed to something that is taken to be 'real' (*Reassembling the Social* 90). Merely demonstrating that some 'thing' is 'made up' cannot, Latour insists, reduce it to 'dust' (92). Rather, to consider some 'thing' as a construct is to consider it as having been brought into being through the mobilisation and combination of a variety of elements that are always both conceptual and concrete, human and nonhuman (91; see also DeLanda).

Such is Latour's own materialist understanding of constructivism. It is one which precludes dismissing certain things—like the soul or the mind—as products of mere thought, language, belief or fantasy. Instead the very assumption that language, belief and so on can—according to new materialism's bracketing off of humanism—be understood as somehow less-than-material is, we would argue, precisely what Latour's claim for the materiality of culture is pitched against. For Latour, every 'thing' is indeed made up. But whether it is fabricated out of beliefs or bricks, every thing shares the same materiality—and so, importantly, everything has the same ontological status. The crucial point here, therefore, is not to identify constructedness with some sort of a 'deficit in reality'—and, in this context, to reproduce a now familiar scientific rejection of theology. It is, rather, to consider *how* things are constructed. As Latour writes, it is precisely because 'construction is so much a synonym for the real that the question shifts immediately' to: 'Is it *well* or *badly* constructed?' (*Reassembling the Social* 89).

* * *

Following Latour, our contention here, therefore, is that any adequate treatment of humanism has to proceed, not by bracketing it off from that materiality which humans and nonhumans share. For, to where could it be annexed? Instead, we are suggesting, what needs to be addressed is precisely how humanism itself was—and is—constructed out of this shared materiality. Even in its explicitly theological formulation, it would, for example, be possible to consider how—and how well—the soul was constructed via the doctrines, arguments, institutions, practices and so on of Christian theology. As Muecke has observed, 'we have only ever managed to philosophise with the help of things: the turning stars, apples which fall, turtles and hares, rivers and gods, cameras and computers' ('The Cassowary'). It would, then, also be possible to approach Descartes' own account of how humans are 'ontologically other than matter' from the perspective of his own references to, and claims about, a whole host of nonhumans: stars, ships, clocks as well as various animals, including ants, flies, parrots, monkeys and so on (see Descartes part V).

Furthermore, the classical assumption that there was 'an immaterial principle ... unique to man' was later supported in terms that went beyond Descartes' own theological and philosophical arguments about the differences between humans and nonhumans (Bynum 466). Seventeenth and early eighteenth-century naturalists, such as Linneaus, drew this conclusion—somewhat reluctantly—from their own inability to differentiate adequately the anatomies of humans from those of the great apes, whose existence had begun to trouble European naturalists from the late seventeenth century onwards (Corbey 40; see also Greene 177). Finally, when later naturalists such as George Friedrich Blumenbach in Germany came to refute the prevailing assumption—held by Linneaus, among others—that the great apes walked upright, then a physical, rather than metaphysical, account of human exceptionalism became conceivable (Blumenbach 6). And, as we have indicated (see Anderson chapter 5; Anderson and Perrin), it was forged through the modern colonial practice of craniometry, which in its desperate search for some correlation between head shape and intelligence relied upon an ever-changing variety of measures, ratios, protocols and instruments that, again, may be considered as the 'material' out of which a modern idea of human exceptionalism was produced. This idea, then, has variously—but always—been constructed. So whilst it may well be possible to argue that a theological argument for humanism is—in its recourse to the existence of an immaterial soul—constructed 'badly', such an argument cannot simply be rejected on the basis that, as immaterial, the soul is just a fantasy. And similarly, Descartes' dualism must also be considered as the product of a flat ontology, the bare assertion of which cannot be sufficient to do away with the dualism itself. It is, however, possible to discern in new materialism's reliance on the insight that everything is material a presumption of this sufficiency: as if the assertion of our shared material existence with nonhumans was, on its own, enough to overcome humanism's exceptionalist conceit.

Across many disciplinary fields in the cultural and social sciences, it is now possible to discern the displacement of a humanist 'order of reason, mind, or consciousness' (Plumwood 16) more or less term for term by an affirmation of the 'sensory, bodily and affective' character of human existence (Whatmore 'Materialist Returns' 606). Those dimensions of culture conventionally regarded as uniquely human—such as meaning-making, or fantasising—have thus tended to be excluded from the material, and thus excluded from the realm of materialist consideration. Indeed, now considered as somehow less-than-material, they seem to exhibit an uncertain existence in, to cite Whatmore, 'the abstract spaces of social life' (*Hybrid Geographies* 27).

The strain in this shift bears more critical examination. For, in bracketing off the 'thinking human subject' from the material, isn't there a risk of

decentring the human not from culture, but merely from our descriptions of culture? As we have indicated, today's human exceptionalists readily acknowledge that we are biological creatures. It is just that human culture is distinctive, in Malik's words, because 'we *also* have self-consciousness, agency and the capacity for rationality' ('Science and the Human Animal' 51). And enter here the familiar claims of human distinctiveness and superiority. One can, then, readily imagine today's humanists remaining untroubled—if not just uninterested—by the numerous analyses across today's cultural studies of our material encounters with other materialities: as merely an analysis of something *other* than what they would consider to be culture.

In this respect, doesn't new materialism risk offering a somewhat straitened account of culture? That is: doesn't its own conception of culture-as-material remain limited by its strategic bracketing off of 'what is commonly taken as distinctive or even unique about humans' (Bennett, *Vibrant Matter* ix)? And so: doesn't the very project of revitalising nonhumans also suffer from a somewhat inhibited conception of the material? It is, we would suggest, possible to discern in this project—and in, for example, Bennett's own equation of nonhuman agency with the 'vibrancy' or 'vitality' of things—a strain or a reluctance to push those things too far in a direction that would seem to put into question their materiality. As if the notion of agency being evoked here had to stop short of that capacity for creativity and meaning-making on which the very project of humanism relies. Again, here, humanism cannot be excluded from that flat ontology which new materialism advocates. At least not without blinding itself to the richer conception of materiality suggested by Latour's observation—clearly intended to apply to both humans and nonhumans—that 'organisms themselves make up their own meanings' ('Will Non-humans be Saved?' 13).

To understand human exceptionalism as a worldly, rather than an otherworldly, construction is not, of course, to endow it with any kind of solid foundation. On the contrary: it is to expose its constructedness to an interrogation that, as we have indicated, the very bracketing off of humanism from the material has tended to foreclose. So, from this perspective, it becomes possible to see exactly how humanism has, in its diverse articulations, been fabricated. It becomes possible to see how an idea of intelligence that is still pervasive today was forged through a highly unstable set of practices and technologies out of a dubious and now clearly indefensible amalgam of physiognomy and nineteenth-century cultural and colonial prejudice. To approach humanism as a material configuration, and so to see 'the tiny ingredients' out of which it has been made, is, therefore, to be able to expose its contingency. As Joanna Bourke has recently argued, 'to understand the *instability* of definitions of the human, we need history' (5, emphasis added). And—somewhat against the straitened new

materialist narrative—it is, precisely the disjunctures and discontinuities, the dead ends and the disasters, in the various formulations and trajectories of ideas of human distinction that its own materiality is able to reveal.

For Hamilton, plans 'to engineer the Earth through the deployment of contrivances to manipulate the atmosphere represent the fulfilment of three and half centuries of objectification of nature' (200). We accept that on the point of humanity's environmental impact Hamilton's concern is well placed. But to consider this 'objectification' as a kind of unwavering ideology, as an unswerving commitment to some invariant belief, is to grant it, not just an implausible constancy, but a dangerous consistency. It is, then, to obscure the very historicity of humanism. We urgently need to overcome the still pervasive idea that the value of human reason, meaning, knowledge-making and creativity lies in *rising above* our worldly—and indeed our animal—existence. But to effectively counter what Latour has recently referred to as 'the Australian strategy of sleepwalking towards catastrophe' ('On Some of the Affects of Capitalism' 1), this figure of the nature-transcendent human must, we have argued here, be understood not as an otherworldly fantasy, but as a worldly, and for this reason an always-contingent, always-unstable, production. A materialist engagement with—rather than disengagement from—the idea of human exceptionality is, therefore, vital for a humanities tuned to a planet under pressure. At least if this idea is to be exposed: not, to use Hamilton's word, as 'unrelenting' (200); but rather to 'the troubling and exhilarating feeling that things could be different' (Latour, *Reassembling the Social* 89).

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Thirty Years On: Reading the Country and Indigenous Homeliness

By Prof. Ken Gelder

Oxford UK, 2016

The recent reprinting by re.press of Stephen Muecke, Krim Benterak and Paddy Roe's *Reading the Country: Introduction to Nomadology* (1984) is a useful reminder, thirty years on, of just how contemporary this remarkable book still is.¹ Although it isn't 'anthropological' (and speaks in fact about the 'death of anthropology', a discipline from which it distances itself), *Reading the Country* nevertheless embarks on a journey with which anthropologists would be only too familiar: with Muecke getting into the car, driving out to a remote community in north-west Western Australia to encounter a Moroccan artist and a senior Aboriginal man, Paddy Roe, and talking and listening, transcribing, and then reflecting on what has been transcribed. The book is also an expression of male companionship—if we think of the meaning of 'companion', *with bread*—where three men (and, sometimes, others) come to know each other by sitting down together, and making spaces for each other, although in very different ways, with very different outcomes: stories and narratives, paintings, and various intellectual meditations on all this that drew extensively and specifically on Deleuze and Guattari's use of the term *nomadology*.

The emphasis in *Reading the Country* is on movement, tracking, and travel; those moments of companionship therefore seem provisional, as if no one stays in the same place for very long. This is consistent with nomadology, which doesn't seem to encourage a reading that might by contrast place an emphasis on home, or homeliness. The only 'homestead' in *Reading the Country* belongs to the Roebuck Plains sheep station: while nomadology is tied to Indigeneity, homesteads are understood as the outcome of colonialism and settlement. (I shall return to the word *homestead* later on.) On the other hand, in a narrative about making rain on the station, Paddy Roe remarks at one point, after some hard work: 'We go back home—/ go back for dinner' (85): a familiar homely image. Indigenous land ownership is cast in this way too, as it must be in modern Australia. Muecke talks occasionally about Paddy Roe's 'home country with which he has the closest links' (23). Roe is a welcoming host in this book, while Muecke and Benterak are visitors or guests: 'Krim and I', Muecke writes, 'set up camp at Coconut Wells, on Paddy's block of land. Not only do Paddy Roe and Butcher Joe (Nangan) live here, but also various members of Paddy's family at different times' (26). In this account, Roe's home—and home country—is both colonised and hospitable.

Homeliness might seem like the opposite of nomadology. But here is another homely moment, this time in an article Muecke published much later on, called 'Visiting Aboriginal Australia' (1999). Here, he thinks back to his first job in Perth in 1974—ten years before *Reading the Country* was published—and recalls some bad but no doubt well-meaning advice from a senior anthropologist there: "Don't have anything to do with Aboriginal women", this man says, "or Aboriginal politics". Muecke writes: 'I was embarrassed [by this advice], for only the other night I had been in Gloria's bath. When I moved into the Everett St flats, my hot water was out of action, so Gloria, immediate neighbour across the hall [an Indigenous woman], had invited me to use her tub' (49). Later, she offers Muecke a martini. This is another welcoming encounter ('visiting Aboriginal Australia') that might seem to be outside and even in contradistinction to the frame of *Reading the Country*: metropolitan, not remote; neighbourly, rather than to do with companionship; the host here is a woman, not a man; and the image is indeed homely, rather than nomadic.

I want to use this article to think about homeliness a little more, in the distant aftermath of an important book that had read Indigenous relations to country primarily through the concept of nomadology. Incidentally, the word *Indigenous* itself comes to Australia after the first publication of *Reading the Country*—Muecke himself never uses it—and of course it works to adjust the politics, and the cultural politics, of the word *Aboriginal*. It is therefore possible to say that *Reading the Country* is literally a way of registering the process of 'becoming Indigenous', which as James Clifford has recently noted, involves a combination of relations to country that are both 'displaced' and 'sustained', combining the experience of dispossession and re-attachment. For Clifford, the combination of processes of movement, dislocation and homeliness also means that becoming Indigenous and being diasporic are therefore similar: as he puts it, 'In everyday practices of mobility and dwelling the line separating the diasporic from the Indigenous thickens: a complex borderland opens up' (70).

It does generally seem as if *Reading the Country*—because of Muecke's many contributions to it—is dominated by a Deleuzian use of nomadology; but it isn't, not completely. A whole number of citations flow through the book, making it a sort of tool kit that readers—students, especially—will no doubt continue to enjoy: there's Deleuze and Guattari, but also Foucault, Baudrillard, Barthes and many others, even Dick Hebdige who, by the early 1980s, was an important figure for cultural studies. Muecke's project in *Reading the Country* was indeed a bit like Hebdige's on British punk, bringing a wide range of continental theory to bear on a social group in the hope of illuminating what they do, culturally speaking. (Muecke's work is more successful here, refusing to give up in the way Hebdige finally did; and of course, his project is ethnographic, while Hebdige's was certainly not.) Muecke drew on Hebdige for 'bricolage', channeling anthropology

through cultural studies as he cast Aboriginal families in northwest Western Australia as do-it-yourself 'bricoleurs'. The citation in fact takes us to Dick Hebdige on London's mod subculture: 'the mods', Hebdige writes, 'could be said to be functioning as bricoleurs'. The application of this citation to Aboriginal people in remote communities literally associates the process of 'becoming Indigenous' with becoming *mod*—or more broadly, becoming modern. It is also one of those many moments in *Reading the Country* where an actual social practice is tied to a critical method, a way of reading or encountering texts (which is how nomadology itself is understood):

for both Aboriginal and 'general' readers, there is a pleasure in the text of *bricolage*, a pleasure in seeing the edifice of language tremble a little as it becomes a kind of poetry. Bricolage is flexible, economical and unstable. It does not seek continuity or harmony in a world of discontinuity and inequality. It is functional rather than idealistic; it uses the wrong object for a useful purpose, but can change according to necessity. It suffers no illusions. It allows a goat to make her home in an abandoned car. (171-72)

This interesting passage ends, perhaps unexpectedly, with another homely image: the car that no longer goes anywhere, a domesticated animal (gendered female), and the idea of dwelling and of home-making—which speaks to what some commentators these days have been calling 'portable domesticity', a practice that brings dislocation, mobility and home-making into proximity with each other (see, for example, Myers). Nomadology was always a bit impatient with homeliness, with the practice of stopping in one place. 'History is always written from the sedentary point of view', Deleuze and Guattari observed; 'What is lacking is a Nomadology, the opposite of a history' (25). But the nomadological emphasis on movement and travel always ran the risk either of romanticisation or appropriation, as many commentators have since observed.² In the mid-1990s, Rosi Braidotti had tied nomadology or nomadism to a kind of cosmopolitan, multilingual, romantically-conceived feminism: 'As an intellectual style', she wrote in 1994, 'nomadism consists not so much in being homeless, as in being capable of recreating your home everywhere. The nomad carries his/her essential belongings with him/her wherever s/he goes and can recreate a home base anywhere' (16). This is another expression of portable domesticity, reminding us of just how entwined nomadology and homeliness can be. James Clifford had written about 'dwelling *and* travelling; travelling-in-dwelling, dwelling-in-travelling' in his earlier book, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (1997); he goes on to ask, 'What are the political stakes in claiming (or sometimes being relegated to) a "home"?' (36).

Since nomadology, cultural criticism over the last twenty-five years or so has returned again and again to the question of home and homeliness. Think of the geographer Doreen Massey, for example, and her interest in

'place' as a 'point of intersection', a '*meeting* place' (a place of companionship) which looks both inward and outward: 'which is extroverted' and 'includes a consciousness of its links with the wider world' (155). This is place becoming modern, defined as much by those who don't live there (visitors, tourists, anthropologists, etc.) as those who do. The question is, as David Morley puts it, why in the midst of all this 'particular people stay at home' and 'how, in a world of flux, forms of collective dwelling are sustained and reinvented' (12).

Becoming Indigenous is also a matter of becoming modern: where the experiences of dislocation and dispossession underwrite, and shape, expressions of attachment to land. This binary has of course been remarkably influential in Australia, structuring the ways in which Indigenous Australians and their various claims on the nation—to land, to children, and so on—are recognised and understood. In anthropology, this can mean that Indigeneity is sometimes negatively conceived as a condition that can never be complete-in-itself, although I would add that it is hardly alone in this. This is what Elizabeth Povinelli suggests, for example, in her book *The Cunning of Recognition: Indigenous Alterities and the Making of Australian Multiculturalism* (2002):

At the most simple level, no indigenous subject can inhabit the temporal or spatial location to which indigenous identity refers—the geographical and social space and time of authentic Ab-originality ... Producing a present-tense indigenusness in which some failure is not a qualifying condition is discursively and materially impossible. (49)

Here, the idea of Indigeneity-in-(its)-place is not allowed; it is literally not quite at home in these remarks. One can see why Muecke in *Reading the Country* was ambivalent about anthropology. But it is also possible to see how the discursive shift from *Aboriginal* to *Indigenous* in the discipline of anthropology carries with it precisely this kind of structural adjustment, where 'becoming Indigenous' and 'becoming modern' inhabit the same space even as, together, they make the question of the inhabitation of *place*—we might say, of dwelling, or home, or even of settlement—one that is always in process and never fully realisable.

Muecke's work in *Reading the Country* knows very well that the anthropological binary of the settled (or sedentary) and the nomadic is a bit of a mixed blessing. As one of those people who all-too-casually tends to collapse nomadology into nomadism, I'm always inclined to think here of Henry Mayhew's famous (or notorious) introduction to *London Labour and the London Poor* from the early 1860s, which saw nomadic 'tribes' flowing through the centre of a sedentary metropolis: itinerant, tied to territory but not property, ephemeral not permanent, and so on. The question of place or of settlement (who can claim it, who can't) becomes both contingent and essential here, just as it is when we think about Indigeneity in Australia in

the aftermath of *Reading the Country*. In her earlier book *Labor's Lot: The Power, History and Culture of Aboriginal Action* (1994), Elizabeth Povinelli had looked at the predicament of Indigenous women in several remote communities across the Northern Territory. A 'woman's voice is generally marginalised' by anthropologists, she notes;

but women map out connections to land, they govern in various ways, and so on. The emphasis in [Povinelli's] book is on dwelling or residency, on belonging to land as a matter of position and degree: Aboriginal women who had come to the Docker River settlement, for example, ask not who belongs there 'instead of someone else ... [but] who belonged there more than someone else?' (43)

'Whose Settlement—whose "country"', Povinelli asks, 'is Docker River?' (43), and in relation to what conceptual and legal frameworks? What I want to pause over here is precisely the use of that word *settlement* in the context of thinking about Indigenous relations to place. Usually, we use *settlement* in relation to settlers, to non-Indigenous colonials and postcolonials; and our postcolonial response to this is to talk at the same time about *un-settlement*, about the capacity for settlement (under postcolonial conditions) to be something that can never fully be *settled*. Jane M. Jacobs and I wrote about this predicament at length in *Uncanny Australia* back in 1998, but the issue still seems to be trending even in these post-postcolonial times, and we can still see variations on it today. A good example is John Frow's recent essay in *Cultural Studies Review*, titled 'Settlement', no less, which turns back to the Tonnesian notion of *gemeinschaft* (community) and to Georg Simmels' iconic figure of the stranger as a visitor from outside who—once he arrives—does not leave. Frow looks at Tommy McRae's remarkable 1890s drawing of the escaped convict William Buckley's colonial encounter—and colonial exchange—with local Aboriginal people, and he sees it in terms of the way McRae presents a Buckley as a settler who is nevertheless also a stranger: something more than a visitor, someone who seems, as Andrew Sayers puts it, almost to have 'bridged the (seemingly unbridgeable) gap between Aboriginal and settler society' (75). That is, Buckley is someone who—through his encounter with Aboriginal people—has 'left the world of white settlers' to become, literally, *unsettled* (a word that Frow repeats a number of times). Frow's view of the Aboriginal world Buckley enters is equivocal, however, because it is itself 'becoming modern' through the colonial encounter. That world, he writes, is 'not unproblematically a community' (16)—although he adds that it is at the same time 'clearly, still, a community' (16), as if that moment *before* 'becoming modern' cannot be let go of or forgotten: it is a place, but an extroverted place. McRae's drawing of Buckley with a group of Aboriginal people therefore gives us what Frow calls an image of 'settlement with the stranger' (16), and it looks as if he means *Aboriginal*

settlement here: where McRae's drawing appears to convey an Aboriginal world in which whites are accepted, as Frow puts it, 'almost as equals' (16).

This is, of course, a benign view of colonial exchange and the colonial encounter, built around what is often now called in cultural studies and elsewhere 'convergence': where you look at otherwise *divergent* social groups to analyse those points or moments where they actually meet or come together: their points of intersection. It is an approach that has played itself out in various ways both before and after *Reading the Country*. Felicity Collins and Therese Davis's book, *Australian Cinema After Mabo* (2004), opens by quoting Muecke on the film *Backroads* and its 'moments of exchange': where 'characters gain and lose identities, transferring and transforming cultural understandings' (cited 166). Then they look at the films *Rabbit-Proof Fence* and Rolf de Heer's *The Tracker*, pursuing the figure of the stranger in the latter film through the relationship between what it calls the Tracker and the Follower: 'The Follower becomes a stranger in The Tracker's eyes ... [Their] friendship ... is premised on a recognition of difference but one that allows for an ethics of hospitality. The Tracker is now recognised as the one who is "at home", welcoming The Follower to another's country where they are both strangers, or guests' (16). In this passage, Indigeneity is understood through the figure of the stranger even when it is *at home* (a phrase that now finds itself in inverted commas: as if it, too, can never be at home with itself). It is a relational or relative condition, in other words, playing out precisely this entangled predicament of dislocation and homeliness. This is something that anthropology—in spite of everything—has understood very well. The Brazilian anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro is one among many others who has recently thought about the question of 'convergence', in an article titled 'The Relative Native': wondering in particular about whether anthropological knowledge applies concepts that are 'extrinsic to their object' (for example, applying Deleuze and Guattari's concept of nomadology or Hebdige's concept of bricolage to Aboriginal people in remote north-west Western Australia), or whether 'the procedures involved in anthropological investigation are of the same *conceptual order* as the procedures being investigated' (477): that is, where what is 'extrinsic' somehow does indeed manage to converge with (rather than just, say, visit and leave) the object of study.

I have been raising all these issues and processes—'becoming Indigenous' and 'becoming modern', convergence and the colonial or postcolonial encounter, the question of settlement and Indigeneity, the question of the home and Indigenous domesticity and so on—not least because I had been interested in a criticism made recently of something Jane M. Jacobs and I wrote some years ago in our book *Uncanny Australia*—and for better or worse, I want to outline that criticism here. Alison Ravenscroft's book *The Postcolonial Eye* (2012) is in most respects the complete opposite

of *Reading the Country*. Whereas Muecke, Benterrak and Roe invest in notions of companionship and hospitality and open up Aboriginal storytelling for discussion and circulation—making Aboriginal knowledges of land and place available to non-Aboriginal readers—Ravenscroft's book wants to set limits to all this: there are things non-Indigenous readers of Indigenous narratives, she insists, are not supposed to know, or cannot know. She wants to assert 'the idea of radical differences between white and Indigenous cultural forms' (2): she is against 'convergence' because she wants to preserve Indigenous alterity (which means that her 'native' is not 'the relative native'). So her book is a sort of gatekeeping exercise, where (by, for example, stressing her intimacy with Indigenous writing rather than her companionship with Aboriginal people) she is somehow able to know what it is that non-Indigenous people cannot know. Her readings are therefore introverted, not extroverted—if I can draw again on Doreen Massey's description here. In a chapter about *Uncanny Australia*, Ravenscroft goes on to claim that Jacobs and I had inadvertently compromised the alterity of what she calls 'the Aboriginal subject'; and to make her argument, she looks at a story we read and commented on in our book, told by Percy Mumbulla and transcribed by Roland Robinson way back in 1958, called 'The Bunyip'. This story involves a marauding bunyip figure, which (as we say in our reading) turns up unannounced at Percy Mumbulla's parents' 'homestead' and has what we call an unhomely effect. In Simmel's terms, the bunyip is a stranger. Percy's mother and father are, as we note, unsettled by the bunyip's visit but they also negotiate with this figure (in 'the language') and are able to remain in their place ('at home'). For Ravenscroft, however, we

install an Aboriginal family at home, in place. This is not any old place, though; for Gelder and Jacobs this is the place of the white man. Gelder and Jacobs call the family's home a homestead, an extraordinary misnomer, for whoever heard of an Aboriginal family with a homestead? (84)

Ravenscroft then suggests that we compromise the alterity of this Indigenous family to such an extent that we represent them as if they are nothing less than (non-Indigenous) 'settlers': dwelling 'in the homestead', as she puts it, 'rather than [for example] on an "Aboriginal settlement"' (85).

I was interested here in the way that for Ravenscroft Indigenous people can inhabit an 'Aboriginal settlement' without being homely or 'at home' or (we might even say) 'in the home'—putting aside the banal fact that, in the story we are talking about, Percy Mumbulla's mum and dad are standing *outside* the home when the bunyip visits. Returning to the binary of the sedentary and the nomadic that is so important to nomadology and *Reading the Country*, we might then say that Ravenscroft wants Aboriginal people to be 'in place', even *settled*, but not 'at home'—a condition she ascribes only to *settlers*. The word *homestead* does, of

course, have settler connotations, used in *Reading the Country* only to identify the sheep station on Roebuck Plains. But is this the only connotation it can have? Percy Mumbulla and his parents lived at Wallaga Lake Aboriginal settlement on the south coast of NSW. In May 1950, state government records tell us, 'work commenced on the construction [of] 15 houses for Aboriginal People, a store, recreation hall, school and roads' ('Wallaga Lake Aboriginal Station'). Mark McKenna notes that Aboriginal people at Wallaga Lake 'had ... campaigned for better housing in the 1950s' (172), writing petitions and so on: these campaigns were relatively successful. We know very well that Aboriginal housing and state intervention have always been intimately entwined, where the boundaries between homeliness and the state (private lives and the public management of those lives) are routinely transgressed. This is another instance of the extroversion of place: someone, rather like the bunyip in Mumbulla's story, is always turning up and making demands, insisting on a response, asking for hospitality, and not always going away. This is what Peter Read says in the introduction to a collection of essays titled *Settlement: A History of Australian Indigenous Housing* (2000):

A cottage inhabited by an Aboriginal family³ was less a shelter than an instrument of management, education and control. It is not until, broadly, the entry of the Commonwealth government after the 1967 referendum that Aboriginal housing assumes its more recognisable form of providing shelter, a hearth, a refuge of affection and an armour of security. Many of the subsequent battles were fought over who, in the end, was to control accommodation and shelter. (1)

Helen Ross takes the title of her earlier book, *Just for Living* (1987), from a different perspective on Aboriginal housing, writing that 'While it is useful to know how [Aboriginal] people use, that is, live in, their houses, it is equally important to step back from the housing-centric view of affairs and consider how, even whether, housing plays a role in people's daily and whole lives' (3). 'For some Aboriginal people', she goes on, 'moving into a house and creating a sense of home there is a major aspiration. For others, the house is more incidental to their lives' (13).

I certainly do not want to invest in a sense of Indigenous homeliness as some sort of utterly assimilated condition, of the kind that leads Ravenscroft to imply that we talked about this Aboriginal mother and father in the late 1950s as if they were 'settlers': as if (forgetting the entanglement of becoming Indigenous and becoming modern) they were somehow not Indigenous at all. On the other hand, I do want to suggest that in the aftermath of *Reading the Country*—both despite and because of this book's emphasis on nomadology—it has been increasingly possible to conceptualise what might very well have once seemed like nomadology's opposite: that is, Indigenous homeliness and being-at-home. We can remember the colonial racism that thought, as Joseph Banks once did, that Aboriginal people didn't

have a sense of land ownership not least because they didn't seem capable of building houses. Their shelters, Banks observed, were 'framed with less art or less industry than any habitations of human beings that probably the world can shew' (cited in Anderson and Perrin, 148). Following on from a long and violent history of Indigenous dispossession after colonisation, we can also remember the more recent histories of Aboriginal evictions from homes: for example, the 1997 Homeswest eviction of an Aboriginal family in Perth to which Quentin Beresford, among others, has drawn attention (See also 'The Homeswest Incident,' Martin 145-48). We could also think about what is now called 'out of home care' for Indigenous children in state institutions, and what it means *not* to have a sense of being-in-the-home when Indigenous children are institutionalised by the state. And I also think we should not forget the question of nomadology when we think about Indigeneity 'at home'. In her essay 'Deleuze and Guattari at Muriel's Wedding', Meaghan Morris has reminded us of how these apparently opposite things are in fact folded together: where she reads the chapter *before* the one on nomadology in Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*, to think precisely about *homeliness*. As she puts it, 'homeliness follows the drawing of a circle round an "uncertain and fragile centre" ... home is in the middle of things ... neither origin nor destination, home is produced in an effort to organise a "limited space" that is never sealed in, and so *it is not an enclosure but a way of going outside*' (190). If we think along these lines in particular, then perhaps we can read that image of the bunyip roaring at Percy Mumbulla's mum and dad as they stand outside their home—or 'homestead'—in a way that complicates, rather than flattens, these connections between settlement and unsettlement. And if we think like this, it may help us to consider more adequately—and less dismissively—what it might mean to 'become Indigenous' in the kind of 'limited space' that could be understood as a home.

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Notes

1 *Reading the Country* was reprinted by re.press at the end of 2014, exactly thirty years after the date of its original publication.

2 See, for example, John K. Noyes, Ronald Bogue and others in a special issue of *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, 6.2

(2004), devoted to a discussion of the uses, and usefulness, of nomadology and nomadism.

3 An observation that might very well prompt Ravenscroft to respond, 'whoever heard of an Aboriginal family with a cottage?'

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From Pacific Way to Pacific Solution: Sovereignty and Dependence in Oceanic Literature

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I. Introduction

Debates about Australia's post-2001 refugee detention policies have given rise to much critical thought on new configurations of sovereignty, international law, and human rights obligations.² Yet, given that to date Australia has primarily sent its asylum seekers to detention camps in Nauru and Papua New Guinea, such policies also demand a reconsideration of the country's regional Pacific relationships.³ The goal of this essay is not to parse the legal or human rights implications of offshore processing centres, but to situate the 'Pacific Solution' as part of a longer story of postcolonial sovereignty in Oceania.⁴ It examines the *necessary and prior constitution* of Pacific Islands as potential external detention sites through the lens of colonial history, decolonising desires and contemporary regional relationships. In short, this essay attempts to understand the 'Pacific Solution' in terms of the history of coloniality between Nauru, Papua New Guinea and Australia.

In it, I depart from the predominantly legal and policy-oriented approaches to the refugee problem. Instead, I take a literary and theoretical approach that addresses 'the political imaginations of a world after colonialism' (Hansen and Stepputat 297) as expressed in several fictional texts from Oceania. First I consider the groundbreaking but today little-read novel by the Papuan novelist and political figure Vincent Eri, *The Crocodile* (1970), followed by a collection of short stories from well-known Tongan academic and writer Epeli Hau'ofa, *Tales of the Tikongs* (1983). Finally, I look at Papua New Guinean writer Nash G. Sorariba's gripping short story, 'Escape from Jayapura' (1997). Each text deals with the colonial or neocolonial relationships of Oceanic peoples and their larger neighbours: that between Australia and Papua New Guinea in *The Crocodile*; between Australia, New Zealand and a fictional Pacific Island in *Tales of the Tikongs*; and Western Papua and Indonesia in 'Escape from Jayapura'. Read for the way literature can constitute a counter-archive to official histories, these texts provide us with an alternative figuring of Australia and its regional relationships. As such, they express and make visible certain transformations of sovereignty, namely, how a territorialised, legal and cultural authority gives way to a deterritorialised and economic authority in the postcolonial period. I argue that such a shift is necessary to account for the current configurations of

nation, territory and security that have aligned to produce the body of the asylum-seeker as a new form of twenty-first century global currency. The purpose of this essay is thus to show, from a literary perspective, how the expanding form of offshore detention catches hold of—in a salient and tragic way—the unevenness of sovereignty across those nations involved in the ‘Pacific Solution’.

II. The Crocodile and the *Kiap*

Vincent Eri’s *The Crocodile* (1970) is a remarkable text, not least for being the first published Papuan novel. Born in 1936, Eri was of the first generation of indigenous Papuans to rise through the colonial education system. In 1970 he graduated from the newly established University of Papua and New Guinea and subsequently became a school inspector, member of Parliament, high commissioner to Australia, and Papua New Guinea’s Governor-General from 1990-91 before his death in 1993.

Set primarily in the 1940s, Eri’s novel is the coming-of-age tale of Hoiri, a member of the Toaripi coastal people of the Gulf District, who reaches manhood against the backdrop of Australian colonial rule and the Japanese attacks on Papua and New Guinea in World War II. In a 1973 review of *The Crocodile*, Nigerian critic Kalu Uka identifies many tropes familiar to African postcolonial writing and praises the novel for its faithful representation of ‘the traditional, transitional and modern life of the community in Papua’ (93). In particular, the novel dispels the ‘mythical diet about bizarre black folk on those islands’ (91) by giving ‘the foreigner encyclopaedic information about commerce, education and history of the tribe, about the vegetation, and village life; about marriage customs and rituals’ (93). Indeed, much of the narrative is devoted to providing the reader with a thick description of Toaripi customs and practices based in the village of Moveave. We witness a death, mourning customs, a courtship, marriage and birth, and—not least—a major sea voyage of the village *lakatoi* (canoe) that initiates Hoiri into the adult male world of trading routes and intertribal relationships of the Papuan Gulf District. Other reviewers have similarly noted—as both a strength and weakness of the novel—its ethnographic authenticity with the presentation of Papuan ‘beliefs as they are believed’ (Wilding 235) and ‘Papuan village life as a whole’ (Koll 66).

Yet Eri’s novel is much more than a fictionalised anthropological account of Toaripi life. Like Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* (to which Uka and several other critics have made comparison), *The Crocodile* gives dramatic form to the devastating entry of white man’s civilisation into the Papuan universe, and ‘presents us with a society at the verge of disintegration’ (Stella 176). As in Achebe’s text, the narrative proceeds along two arcs: one relating to the tribal laws and their internal contestations and the other, the decomposition of those already fluid social mores by Australian colonialism. The first arc

revolves around the mysterious death of Hoiri's young wife Mitoro, presumed to be taken and killed by the eponymous crocodile, and involves the complex actions and motivations of sorcerers—*mesiri* men—thought to be tribesmen from a neighbouring clan. The second arc consists of the hardships endured by the Papuans under the Australian colonial government. They are exploited as domestic workers in Port Moresby and as labour for government officers—*kiaps*—who regularly patrol the interior in the effort to 'pacify' and 'civilise' the natives. Later, with the spread of the Pacific War, Papuans work carrying cargo for the Australian troops fighting against Japan. The literary tension produced by the two narrative arcs constitutes the novel's profound critique of the effects of colonial rule.

Notably, this is a novel where the enchanted world shares narrative space and ontological reality with Euro-Australian colonial and capitalist realities. In its most commented upon scene, Hoiri wages an attack on the evil sorcerer-crocodile, where 'literal and metaphoric crocodile are somehow the same' (Stella 177). But having only injured the crocodile/sorcerer, Hoiri remains confused about how to deal with the *mesiri* he holds responsible for his family member's death. He cannot pursue a 'traditional' course of action both because of his father's deaconship—the church frowns upon such 'superstitions'—and because white *kiap* law forbids 'primitive' payback law. Later in the novel, Hoiri questions an elder uncle about white opposition to traditional authority:

'But why should the missionaries and doctors be annoyed over this? After all these magicians are as helpful as the doctor or the missionary. Look at what has happened. The Government and Christian missions have frightened them away. And yet they can't replace the services these magicians gave to the people. The Government and the missions are ineffective in dealing with the tragedy that occurred in our family.' (Eri 123)

As such, it is the *incomplete and partial* penetration of Australian colonial law and religion that proves most problematic and confusing for Hoiri; the new white authorities '*can't replace* the services these magicians gave to the people'. The point of the novel is thus not merely to catalogue Toaripi customs or protest the exploitative, racist behaviour of the *kiaps*. It is, rather, to demonstrate how the encroachment of colonial systems—via Christianity, forced labour, and *kiap* justice—irrevocably erodes the cultural-legal authority of the Toaripi way of life. The literary result, as one critic notes, is a 'glum deprivation [that] pervades the book', and a protagonist 'to whom baffling things happen' (Griffin 455). In such light, we may understand the novel's self-consciously anthropological descriptions as a *narrative symptom* of the struggle over competing sovereignties and ontologies. Only by attempting to present a complex, whole village life—a universe with its own competing agents and values—can Papuan sovereignty be imagined and asserted against white rule.

Significantly, Australian colonial laws are not the only authority Hoiri encounters. Despite Hoiri's suspicion of white ways, he comes under the spell of the white man's commodity culture on a visit to the colonial capital of Port Moresby. After a successful sago trading trip with the Motu people of Hanuabada, Hoiri stops at a provisions store with his father and uncle.

The goods in the shop were just fascinating. It was unbelievable that human beings could make such wonderful things. ... If only the shiny pots on the shelves could be bought for bundles of sago, they would rather buy these than clay pots from the Motu. (Eri 44)

His father and uncle buy clothing and some canvas sail, in the process suffering racial harassment from the white store clerk. The episode reveals both an enchantment with gleaming commodities and resentment at the racist colonial environment, such that Hoiri concludes, 'spending the money was as much of an ordeal as earning it' (45). Hoiri's uncle, meanwhile, astutely perceives the underlying relationship between things and labour in a colonial economy: 'White people are very clever aren't they? They bring all these wonderful things here and also make the money that one needs to buy them. We've got to work for them to get the money to buy them with' (45). The money economy thus functions to erode traditional trading and labour practices and deepen colonial authority. The destructive nature of the white economy is further confirmed when Hoiri is dragged into the war working for ANGAU (the wartime Australian and New Guinea Administrative Unit). He receives tobacco and £11 as payment for the three years he is forced to work as cargo carrier, while the nearly £50 he earns selling hand carvings of canoes to U.S. soldiers is confiscated by the Australians. At the end of the war, the exhausted Hoiri is returned to his neglected home village, a man defined by loss. In addition to losing his mother and wife, his father has died while working as a carrier for another army unit, and Hoiri is left alone with his small son to care for.

There are two claims I want to make regarding Eri's novel. First, the tale vividly limns a concept of colonial sovereignty that is, in essence, about controlling and organising *bodies, territory and production*. Unsurprisingly, Australian rule is figured as the 'supremacy of power or authority' or 'power beyond accountability' (Brown 52); its everyday modes are the power to enforce 'kiap justice', control mobility, and introduce a money and wage economy in the service of creating a modernised, Australianised Papuan populace. My second claim is that we recognise *The Crocodile* as a novel that looks both backward and forward. In anticipating the independent nation that Papua New Guinea would become in 1975, *The Crocodile's* loose *bildungsroman* form can equally be read as 'a political document, ... a major contribution to the growing body of writing which expresses a specifically Papua and New Guinea identity' (May 59). It not only archives the destructive modes of colonial authority of the 1930s-40s, but presages Nuigini's coming sovereignty through articulations of native law and culture,

especially in scenes where the Toaripi people meet and find common ground with other Papuans (DeLoughrey 132).

The Crocodile is thus a work that aligns with the ideology of the Pacific Way (and its subcategory, the Melanesian Way), a locally-based movement that arose in the decolonising 1970s. Coined by Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, but most fully articulated by Ron Crocombe in 1976,⁵ the Pacific Way posited a broadly common regional identity as the basis for 'Pacific people to ... be actively involved to the fullest possible extent in shaping *their own future*' (Crocombe, 'Seeking' 1, italics added) in the move beyond colonialism. It was envisaged as both a process of alternative regional development and a way to reinvigorate Pacific cultures by encouraging 'native communal and familial values, consensus building, reciprocity, indigenous arts, and inter-island cooperation and unity' (DeLoughrey 128). *The Crocodile* powerfully anticipates the expected transition from colonial dependence to decolonisation and self-determination. And yet, the novel's tragic and unresolved ending foreshadows the difficulties that a postcolonial Oceanic sovereignty will face.

III. Sovereignty in Oceania

Before contrasting Eri's novel with Hau'ofa's stories, let us briefly consider the historical configuration of sovereignty in the region since colonisation. Recall that after several centuries of imperialist land grabs by the Spanish, British, Germans, French and Americans—and the fact that many islands were *multiply* colonised—the Pacific was subject to the League of Nations Mandate System following World War I. The system was established to lead 'peoples not yet able to stand by themselves' (Article 22, League of Nations Covenant, qtd. in Anghie 120) gradually to independence by the guidance of approved regional powers. By this logic, the three former German colonies in the Pacific—New Guinea, Nauru and Samoa—could not rule themselves and came under Australian and New Zealand control. The two Dominion Powers in the Pacific 'were intent on annexing the former German territories and were placated only partially by being appointed mandatories over those territories' (Anghie 121). Greg Fry notes that for the two former British colonies, experience in 'managing' their own domestic natives—the Australian indigenous peoples and the Maoris—authorised them to deal with these other natives, assuming their 'special right to manage, steeped in old racist premises' ('Framing' 56). Control of Papua New Guinea's strategic territory and Nauru's rich phosphate resources thus fulfilled longstanding imperialist desires toward the Pacific that have been called Australia's 'first foreign policy' (Thompson 2). In sum, the Mandate and ensuing post-World War II UN Trusteeship systems helped consolidate the 'second-order colonialism' (Landsman 3) that elevated Australia, in particular, from British colony to colonising nation.

Amidst the worldwide fervor for postwar decolonisation—including Krushev’s famous 1960 condemnation of Australia at the UN—Australia was compelled to grant independence to Nauru in 1968 and Papua New Guinea in 1975. David Kavanamur *et al.* note, however, that at independence in Papua New Guinea there was little unity and ‘no charismatic leaders in the vein of Gandhi, Sukarno or Nkrumah’ to produce a populist nationalism capable of driving out colonial powers (2). Australia’s ‘hasty departure’ left a ‘vastly underdeveloped new nation’ (Kin 218) whose major industries—coffee, copra and rubber—remained in the hands of Australians (219). In Nauru, aggressive Australian and British strip-mining of its phosphate resources left the island with serious environmental degradation, unsustainable debt and a dubious economic future.⁶ Consequently, compared to other regions of the world, the transition from colonial territory to postcolonial nationhood in Papua New Guinea and Nauru has been especially marked by the structures of neo-colonialism and dependence. Founded in Canberra in 1947, the South Pacific Commission (now renamed the Secretariat of the Pacific Community) simultaneously coordinated both the region’s decolonisation *and* its development ties. To quote Matt Matsuda: ‘As island nationalists agitated for self-determination, colonial governments promoted commonwealth plans: political independence within treaty frameworks of representative government and special trade and development agreements’ (303-04). Hau’ofa similarly notes, ‘unlike other colonial regions of the world, our political independence ... was largely imposed on us. It also came in packages that tied us firmly to the West’ (*Ocean* 47-48). By 1977, when the Colombo Plan for Cooperative Economic Development in Asia finally included Oceania, many individual states had ‘become even more dependent on Western funds, Western technology and Western priorities for the region’ (Haas 8). Moreover, from the mid-1970s to 1989 the Pacific was treated as a Cold War security region; following the U.S.’s lead in other parts of the world, Australia quadrupled its aid to the region ‘as a the key to keeping the Soviet influence out of the region and creating a pro-Western order’ (Fry, ‘Our Patch’ 82).

In thinking about the preconditions to today’s Pacific Solution, then, we must understand the *longue durée* in which both Papua New Guinea and Nauru have been repeatedly and thoroughly instrumentalised, first in the ‘Pacific resource adventure’ (Landman 227) under Australia’s ‘second-order’ colonial rule, and then in relationships whereby aid packages, development support and preferential trade agreements flow in a configuration that continues to be dictated by the former metropole. As Hau’ofa explains of the latter:

For what they [Australia and New Zealand] give out in aid they receive in return a great deal more in the forms of export earnings and repatriation of profits on investments. It may be said that as far as the regional

relationships are concerned, if the words 'aid' and 'help' are to be used at all, they should more correctly be used in terms of the small islands 'aiding' the two big neighbours. (*Ocean* 20)

The phenomenon is well known in development studies and has appropriately been termed 'boomerang aid'. The point is that colonial era economic and political hierarchies were never superseded in the post-independence era, but have been actively rearticulated through neocolonial dependency. In other words, one set of boundary markers is simply substituted by another: the categories civilised/uncivilised; European/native; modern/traditional are now recast as developed/undeveloped; aid donor/recipient (Escobar 5-6).

To bring us back to our original inquiry, I argue that literary texts are capable of expressing the complex shifting modalities through which imperial exploitation in the Pacific is coded. In Eri's *Crocodile*, it is ordered around a colonial political sovereignty that seeks to civilise native bodies and territory as modern and *productive*, training bodies to work on patrols, plantations and in war, and is expressed in Eri's attempt to both archive the violence of colonial authority and imagine an indigenous counter-sovereignty. In the post- and neocolonial 1980s background of Hau'ofa's stories, to which we now turn, Pacific islands may have gained nominal sovereignty but remain as dependent on their former colonisers as ever. The emphasis shifts to *financial and economic authority*, undertaken through the mechanism of development aid, and correspondingly takes on a new aesthetic form.

IV. Islands of Debt and Dependency

Epeli Hau'ofa is perhaps best known for his groundbreaking work on Pacific culture and regionalism in his essays 'Our Sea of Islands' (1993) and 'The Ocean in Us' (1997). He is also the author of the raucous 1987 novel *Kisses in the Nederends* and *Tales of the Tikongs*, a collection of satirical short stories set on the island of Tiko, usually regarded as a fictionalised version of Tonga. Hau'ofa himself grew up in Papua New Guinea to Tongan parents, was educated in Australia and Canada, taught at the University of Papua New Guinea and then for many years at the University of the South Pacific in Fiji, a biography reflecting his complex Oceanic identity.

The unique literary form of Hau'ofa's pithy *Tales of the Tikongs* draws from oral tales, the Christian sermon and the tall tale (Wilson 129), and becomes the perfect vehicle for tales of postcolonial development aid gone awry. As Joseph Slaughter suggests, the failure of development aid is told through an aesthetic that is itself resolutely anti-realist and anti-traditional, functioning as a 'burlesque[... of] the inflated rhetorics of humanitarianism, developmentalism, postcolonialism, and internationalism' (206).⁷ In the 'Big

Bullshit', for example, Pulu Makau receives livestock via a New Zealand aid scheme. Despite his best efforts to turn Tiko into 'a regular pastureland' in New Zealand's image, he loses the animals one by one due to village obligations and misdirected Christian mores. Meanwhile, in the 'Seventh and Other Days', the persistent failures of the Family Planning Association and low productivity of public servants present a challenge for the 'Wise Men at the Thinking Office', who hire an Overseas Expert, 'Mr Merv Dolittle from the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, Canberra', to try and make Tikongs work harder.

Immediately evident is that, in contrast to Eri's Toaripi characters, the Tikongs no longer inhabit a fleshed-out social world or an authentic cultural frame into which the foreigner intervenes. These are stories that employ a distortive, ironic narrative frame to critique the economic ripple effects of international loans, grants or donated equipment. Unlike the loathsome and openly racist Australians of Eri's novel, the comically awful donors and development experts of Hau'ofa's world are mere facilitators of the broader functioning of Pacific capitalism. Yet the effects of such financial interventions are both less direct and more profound in altering social structures. Thus, while in *The Crocodile* the unjust economic system of the Australians was earnestly critiqued, in *Tikongs* the logic and authority of dependency-development is precisely *not* up for debate except via Hau'ofa's topsy-turvy satire.

We can trace the shift in modes of authority in Hau'ofa's story 'The Tower of Babel'. After the Tikong export fishing industry fails despite the donation of a retired Japanese fishing vessel, the development of a 'Nation with a Fish Cannery' (20) is left to 'one Alvin (Sharky) Lowe of Alice Springs, Australia' (21). Sharkey is

a Great Expert with lifelong experience in handling natives in New Guinea, Thursday Island, and in a certain humpy settlement outside his gentle hometown of Alice Springs. He had developed a good feel for the Grassroots, demonstrating it by grabbing every frightened, small-time, part-time fisherman on the beaches of Tulisi and forcing him ever so gently to accept \$4000 in Development Loans from the Appropriate Authorities. And, like the Great Shepherd of Nazareth, Sharky converted many frightened fellows into fishermen. (21)

The story follows the misfortunes of one 'frightened, small-time, part-time fisherman', Ika Levu, who is pressured into taking a fishing loan by Sharky's pidgin paraphrase of developmental logic: 'Now is duty belong you to help Tiko come up rich fela country' (22). Since Sharky represents the Japanese and Australian fishing companies, his loans of thousands of boats, nets, motors and equipment actually means that—following 'boomerang aid' logic—'in helping the development of Tiko, Sharky had helped the development of himself and his companies most generously' (23). Ika,

meanwhile, is told little about how to manage his debt payments. When he musters the courage to visit the office of the 'Appropriate Authorities' to seek help, he finds every officer on a 'training' trip to Geneva, Sydney or Jakarta (24). Falling further and further behind on his payments, Ika decides to end his predicament: he takes out his imported boat and equipment to sea, 'pulled out an axe and hacked a huge hole in the bottom of the boat. Then he swam slowly ashore, cool and relaxed for the first time in months and months' (25).

Hau'ofa's dense narrative deserves unpacking. Sharky, our Australian loan agent, deftly recycles his skills in 'handling natives' across Alice Springs and the Pacific, reflecting the history of Australian colonial relations toward its domestic indigenous population, the annexed Torres Strait Islands, as well as Papua New Guinea. Sharky's ability to coerce Ika into taking the development loan is thus explicitly narrated as a continuation of Australia's (sub)imperialist role in the Pacific. More profoundly, the loan arrangement also produces a distinct relationship between Sharky and Ika and, metonymically, between Australia and Tiko. Gone is the 'white man's burden' of Australians depicted in *The Crocodile*, which one Australian colonial officer laconically summarised as, 'Ah well, I suppose there's a job to be done and that's all there is to it' (Eri 82). Instead, the loan transactions of 'The Tower of Babel' render Sharky the altruistic bearer of technology transfer necessary to Tiko's development, and Ika the grateful 'indigenous subject of development' (Landman 237) who must take up the opportunity (and debt) to make his nation 'come up rich fela country'. Yet, compared with donor countries like Australia and Japan, Tiko will remain hopelessly 'underdeveloped' while 'national development reveals itself to be a program of international dependency' (Slaughter 207). Consequently, the literary imaginary of sovereignty has dramatically shifted between *The Crocodile* and *Tales of the Tikongs*. In the former, detailed descriptions of Toaripi culture negotiate cultural-legal narrative space with the colonial authority of the whites. In contrast, Hau'ofa provides us with curiously little island culture in his stories. He makes satirical references to a corrupted version of Christianity and caricatures island laziness such that, for example, the community in 'The Seventh and Other Days' attends church so assiduously on Sundays that the remaining six days are designated rest days. For Hau'ofa, local culture figures merely as the comic stumbling block of so many development programs, while his withering irony spares neither foreigner nor islander.

We can also contrast these literary topographies of sovereignty by examining *what moves* in each fictional world, both in the sense of what are agents of mobility and what motivates action and plot. In *The Crocodile*, the villagers move from home space to neighbouring tribes for food cultivation, marriages, funerals and trade, as allowed by Toaripi law. Periodically, Australian *kiaps* inspect the villages and recruit young men for labour, while

natives who enter Port Moresby are subject to curfews and racial discipline. Different authorities in the novel thus manifest themselves through control over distinct regimes of mobility. In *Tikongs*, on the other hand, what 'moves' is precisely *financial capital*: loans, aid schemes, donated equipment and the personnel to administer them. Although there is a circulation of local and foreign aid experts around third world capitals—Hau'ofa calls these the 'alien experts, technical advisers, volunteers, and Third World elite employees of the Great International Organisation' (53)—the authority of the development/dependency complex lies not in the disciplining and mobilising of productive bodies across a given territory, but rather in controlling the flows of finance across it. Sovereignty here has no imagined outside and cannot be countered by the positing of social or cultural wholeness; as such, possibilities for self-determination have decidedly run aground. Hau'ofa's satire appears symptomatic of the fact that, by the 1980s, many agreed that the Pacific Way movement had devolved into an 'elitist regional identity' (Hau'ofa, *Ocean* 17) susceptible to corruption and graft. Fry concurs that as an ideology of 'Pacific leaders', it was 'soon challenged by other Pacific islanders as being an exclusivist vision of Pacific cultural identity and as acting to entrench male chiefly rule' ('Whose Oceania?' 6).

Indeed, in his often anthologised story, 'The Glorious Pacific Way', Hau'ofa allegorises the movement's demise with the character of Ole Pacifikiwei, an islander who becomes an unwitting expert in receiving international aid. Beginning with the modest request to fund an oral history project, Ole eventually creates 18 national committees and councils with his friends and families, applies for \$14 million in aid, and becomes a well-known figure 'in certain influential circles in Brussels, The Hague, Bonn, Geneva, Paris, London, New York, Washington, Wellington, Canberra...' (92). What the Pacific Way devolves into here, of course, is an international game where the aided compete with each other for as much donor money as possible. Local culture becomes at best a funding category, and at worst, 'the privileged term in the rate of exchange between indigenous (Third World) supplicant and foreign (First World) benefactor' (Gima 35).

At another level, Hau'ofa's fierce satires draw in sharp relief the shift from the authority of *productive* capital to that of *finance* capital. That is, *Tikongs* reveals how 'objectively' rational development goals—wielded through the offer of financial loans and aid money—only work to increase the islanders' dependence. Meanwhile, control over the instruments of finance capital—loans apparatuses, structural adjustment regimes and development aid packages—remain decisively in the hands of Western powers, 'reinforc[ing] the worldwide economic polarization that has been a feature of capitalist accumulation since its inception' (Surin 91). Not only does the development-dependency complex come to supplant civilisational hierarchies of colonialism, it creates the conditions whereby distributing and

receiving development money becomes the very essence of regional relationships.

V. Development Cooperation, Securitised Aid and Disappearing Asylum Seekers

We can now trace a third configuration of Oceanic sovereignty as that embodied in the present-day Pacific Solution arrangements. Australia's pioneering practice of offshore detention has often been read within the context of Australia's 'new assertiveness' in Oceania since 2001 (Ratuva 87). Recall that the Howard government, inspired by the U.S.'s War on Terror, embarked upon two regional interventions in the early 2000s: one a peace-keeping mission to the Solomon Islands, which had been deemed a security risk and 'failing neighbour', and the other, the 'Enhanced Cooperation Program' which would insert 'in-line managers and police' into the potentially failing states of Papua New Guinea and Nauru (Fry, 'Whose Oceania?' 2).⁸ These interventions accord with what Didier Fassin and Mariella Pandolfi identify as a new trend in international responses which are 'at once military and humanitarian' (10). Such processes 'constitute ... an important political innovation of the late twentieth century, a break with the doctrine of sovereignty that had prevailed until then' (10).

Framed as politically neutral 'regional' and 'cooperative' interventions—but in fact serving Australian (or U.S.) security needs—the interventions might better be understood as the return of brute (neo)colonial sovereignty in the region. Yet, they also rely on the fact that the 1990s shift toward 'structural adjustment programs' or SAPs (loans tied to restructuring requirements) has tended to increase the authority of foreign finance capital and further eroded national sovereignty in the developing world. As one economist notes, Papua New Guinea has been more and more subject to a 'donor-led reform process' whereby international donors dictate the terms *and* content of development projects 'often not tailored to the specific needs and capacities of PNG' (Hnanguie 140-41). The Solomon Islands intervention and the ECP (which was ultimately rejected by Papua New Guinea's High Court in 2005 [Perera 133]) extends the logic of donor-led authority one further step, whereby parts of the Australian state apparatus—in the areas of 'justice, policing, immigration, taxation, transport, and customs' (Perera 68)—are directly inserted into the 'aided' country.

In theorising the new twenty-first century configurations of intervention, aid and sovereignty, Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson have provocatively recast third-country refugee processing as not merely about the brute exercise of sovereign state power over an Agambenian 'bare life'. Rather, they insist we see such practices as the state *management* of migration systems and flexible labour markets under pressure from neoliberal economics. The point of migration systems, they stress, is not simply in

blocking migration, but in 'filtering, selecting, and channeling migration movements' (165). Modeled after the business of 'crisis management' and increasingly relying on private security forces, 'its aim is to flexibly manage the [migration] crisis in the attempt to produce 'economically needed and beneficial flows' (Geiger and Pecoud qtd. in Mezzadra and Nielson 179). A cornerstone of this regime is the *externalisation* of a country's border practices and detention facilities to third-party sites, usually in underdeveloped, postcolonial countries. Enforced under the banner of 'conditional aid', these practices effectively 'intertwine' migration and border control with the notion of 'development cooperation' (Mezzadra and Nielson 172); the effect is what Dinnen has called the '*securitisation of aid*' (3). The development-crazed Pacific of *Tikongs* is thus refigured as a space where the 'donor-led reform process' now carves out sites to relocate its own unwanted state functions.

The Australian government has insisted on expressing the Pacific Solution as a set of bilateral service agreements between equally sovereign parties 'wishing to build on their existing strong and cordial relations', as the 2013 Memorandum of Understanding between Nauru and Australia puts it. The arrangement, however, is better read in terms of 'development cooperation' and 'securitised aid'. In Ian Buchanan's early analysis of the Tampa affair, he explains that

Nauru agreed to take the asylum seekers because Australia not only offered to meet the entire cost of transporting, housing, maintaining and processing them [at the cost of around \$400 million, about \$1 million per refugee], but also to pick up the tab on a number of the island state's more pressing bad debts, such as the \$US1.5 million it owed Pacific Petroleum. In total, Australia provided Nauru with an additional \$20 million dollars worth of aid. PNG, meanwhile, recouped an aid 're-prioritisation' package worth \$34 million. (n.p.)

Such a situation informs us that, in sustaining the global organisation of security and migration, there are relationships between donors, recipients and now humans who have become the very *currency* of development aid. Eri's model of territorialised colonial authority and Hau'ofa's topography of deterritorialised finance are recombined into a complex picture of 'nested' and 'layered' sovereignties (Hansen and Stepputat 307, 309) driven by economic and security imperatives. The control over a population's mobility emphasised in *The Crocodile* returns, but now as the service performed by the host country and private contractors engaged in the booming business of offshore detention.

One discursive effect of the transnational subcontracting of borders is the almost complete erasure of the asylum seekers themselves. The recent agreements between Australia and Papua New Guinea and Nauru, for example, are written in an Orwellian language that opaquely describes

forced deportation and indefinite incarceration as 'transfer, assessment and settlement arrangements'.⁹ The goal of these arrangements is the deterrence of 'people smuggling' and 'irregular migration', ignoring the complex causes of refugee movement in the first place. But most striking is the way the 'transferees' effectively disappear behind the promise of development in the 'host' country:

The Commonwealth of Australia will bear all costs incurred under and incidental to this MOU as agreed between the Participants. If this requires additional development of infrastructure or services, it is envisaged that there will be a broader benefit for communities in which those settled are initially placed. ('Memorandum of Understanding' 3)

Australia effectively offers the development of detention infrastructure and services as an *improvement* to local Nauru communities. In the 2013 resettlement agreement between Australia and Papua New Guinea, the benefits to that country are even more strongly stated. Clause 10 states:

Regional Processing Centres will continue to play an important part in bilateral cooperation, especially as locations to house transferees temporarily should the capacity of communities require development. Australia will work with Papua New Guinea to expand the Manus Island Regional Processing Centre and will also explore with Papua New Guinea the possible construction of other Regional Processing Centres and other options. Regional Processing Centres will be developed so that they can be utilised flexibly for the benefit of local communities or for wider national purposes. ('Regional Resettlement Arrangement' 2)

Note the curious inversion of the first sentence, where we would expect *bilateral cooperation* to play an important role in the *resettlement agreement*. Instead, it is the reverse: 'Regional Processing Centres will continue to play an important part in bilateral cooperation'. The unintended grammatical inference is revealing. The outsourced detention services themselves play an important role because they now *constitute* the development aid relationship. In fact, the awkward phrase, 'especially as locations to house transferees temporarily should the capacity of communities require development', makes it sound as if the detainees are simply there *in order to* wait for the community to be better developed. Put simply, third-country asylum seeker detention is explicitly portrayed as a new growth industry for Papua New Guinea, confirming what Mezzadra and Neilson have recently identified as 'asylum markets' (184). They further note that with the vast and sophisticated technologies of border management, the border has been deterritorialised and 'inscribe[d] ... onto migrants' bodies' (173). Yet from the host country's perspective, the asylum seekers' bodies matter only insofar as they are *bearers of packages of development aid*.¹⁰ Abstracted as 'transferees', they are the new 'privileged currency' exchanged for development aid.

VI. Navigating the Waters

Nash G. Sorariba's suspenseful short story 'Escape from Jayapura' (1997) describes an arduous sea journey. One morning, Pulus Pagawak receives an urgent phone call from his son warning him of imminent state violence—'The military will come for you again' (136)—and he is told he must flee the country immediately with his wife Tamara and their youngest child, 10-year-old John. At the harbour, under the pretence of buying his son an ice-cream, he finds old family friend and ship's captain Boas Lubo who agrees to smuggle his family out of Indonesia that night on his fishing boat. There are many dangers during the journey: the boat is under threat from coastguard surveillance from two countries; a thuggish Indonesian crewman threatens to sabotage the plan and is eliminated; and, for the last stretch, the family must venture forth in treacherous waters in a small rubber dinghy. It is, in fact, a story of illegal people smuggling and 'unauthorised maritime arrivals' before the letter. Yet this is not a tale of Afghan, Iranian or Tamil refugees attempting to cross the seas between Indonesia and Australia. Published by Nash in his 1997 collection *Medal Without Honour* (the first Papuan collection of stories by a single author), the story is not, of course, about the Pacific Solution. Pulus and his family are West Papuans—those on the Indonesian side of the border in what was known as Irian Jaya and who, throughout the Suharto era to the present day, have faced repression and brutality from the Indonesian state.¹¹

Reading the story in this context nevertheless points to another piece in the fragmented picture of Oceanic sovereignty. Nash's story provides background to Papua's divided status through a brief narrative aside: 'The history was complicated. Dutch were the original colonisers of West Papua. Through some mysterious arrangement, West Papua was annexed by Indonesia without the consent of the Melanesian population' (137). When Papuans demanded '[f]reedom of self-determination, religion, culture, and language' (137), the Indonesian state, which considered the Papuans 'wildlife' (138), responded with aerial bombings, mass arrests and public executions, producing a flow of Papuan refugees from Indonesia to Papua New Guinea. Before his escape, Pulus asks himself, 'Why should a man leave his homeland? The land he was entitled to by birth right, race, colour and creed?' (137). During the sea journey Tamara weeps over '[l]osing everything they owned' (141) and the likelihood they will never see their other children again. Again, our literary text makes visible a more complex configuration of regional relationships beyond notions of strong and weak states, aid donors and recipients.

Moreover, although the Pacific Solution has been described as *creating* a refugee problem in places where there was none (Rajaram 290), Nash's story indicates that this is not quite true. Papua New Guinea refuses to question Indonesia's sovereignty over West Papua or to give citizenship to

some 9,000 refugees from West Papua, most of whom live in remote camps without services (Chandler). The first wave to arrive in Manus Island in 1969 were actually placed in refugee camps at the instructions of the Australian administration, and many are simply still there (Chandler).¹² 'Escape from Jayapura' not only adds another historical layer to the story of Australian manipulation of Papuan bodies and border control, but illustrates the entirely abstract nature of Papuan sovereignty for West Papuans.¹³ For people born on this side of the island, trapped by the arbitrariness of colonial borders, there has been no decolonisation. Positioned as the final story in Nash's collection, 'Jayapura' departs from the tenor of the other stories, which mostly detail the violence, poverty and dysfunction of contemporary urban life in Papua New Guinea in a gritty realist narrative. Given that the opening story, 'Medal without Honour', is about Papua New Guinea's contributions to the Australian effort in the Pacific War, we can observe that Papuan life is literally bracketed by historical experiences of colonialism—of Australian rule at one end and the ongoing liberation struggle of West Papuans in Indonesia on the other.

I conclude with this brief reading to again show how literature offers an alternative historical archive of regional relationships in Oceania, and denaturalizes the Pacific Solution as a purely post-2001 phenomenon that relies on the 'convenience' of small, underdeveloped or 'failing' states in the region. As Peter Hitchcock has noted, the notion of 'failure' implies a once-successful state 'that has since disintegrated' (732), and enables Western powers to 'elide the role of former empires in what a nation can become' (741). In short, we see how dependent Oceanic states have been constructed out of the *multiple* legacies of imperial sovereignties: forces which have striven to civilise, modernise, financialise and securitise these people and territories, but very rarely acknowledged their desire for autonomy and sovereignty.

Through literary analysis, we have seen the ways that differential sovereignties of Oceania have been imagined and critiqued across specific colonial and decolonising landscapes, from the competing cultural-legal sovereignties of Eri's *Crocodile*, to the free flowing financial authority of Hau'ofa's *Tikongs*, to the ongoing struggle for decolonisation in Sorariba's 'Jayapura'. Reinscribed within these imaginative geographies, the recent bilateral agreements between Australia, Papua New Guinea and Nauru make all too visible the region's recomposed neocolonial relationships, even as they disappear the asylum seekers themselves. In short, these texts remind us that the 'Pacific Solution' requires analysis not only in relation to human rights, international law, or Australia's attitude toward a region of the world it has referred to as 'our patch'.¹⁴ We must also recognise that detention agreements figured in terms of 'development cooperation' are a *continuation*—and not a departure from—the region's historical distribution of sovereignty, with the result that the relentless flow of

securitised aid now finds its material bearers in the vulnerable bodies of refugees. Hansen and Stepputat have described the modern outsourcing of 'zonal' sovereignty epitomised by offshore detention processing as a kind of return of the repressed, where colonial forms of 'the trading company, the concession, and the royal charter were the main vehicles for early colonial expansion' (308). Yet, in our literary examples, we see that the colonial relation has never been repressed at all. Rather, it has been manifest in a distinct and all-too-present regional imperialism, now appearing in a disastrously reconfigured form.

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Notes

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2 For a summary of the arguments regarding human rights violations, see Jane McAdam and Fiona Chong. For cultural-political analyses of Australian sovereignty and border security policies, see Suvendrini Perera and Nikos Papastergiadis.

3 Following the 2001 Tampa affair, the Howard government set up a detention centre on the tiny island nation of Nauru, where asylum seekers were taken and detained. Subsequent refugees arriving by boat were taken to another detention camp set up on Manus Island, Papua New Guinea. Between 2001-2008, just over 1600 people were taken to the centres and detained; some 700 eventually settled in Australia. Although both centres were closed for several years after much criticism, they reopened in 2012 under a Labor government headed by former Prime Minister Julia Gillard.

4 Like other scholars on Pacific history and culture, I use the term Oceania to distinguish the island nations of the region from the larger countries on the Pacific Rim. Oceania stresses a 'world of people connected to each

other' (Hau'ofa, *We Are the Ocean* 50) rather than mere 'dry surfaces in a vast ocean' (31).

5 See Crocombe's *The Pacific Way: An Emerging Identity*.

6 The level of environmental degradation at independence was such that the Australian government actually offered to relocate the entire population to an uninhabited island and start afresh. See 'Paradise Well and Truly Lost,' *The Economist* 22 December 2001.

7 The Caribbean counterpart of *Tales of the Tikongs* would be Jamaica Kincaid's 1988 satirical essay on neocolonialism and tourism in Antigua, *A Small Place*. There are also important parallels with Nora Vagi Brash's 1980 play, 'Which Way Big Man?', a devastating satire of the Westernised political elite of Papua New Guinea.

8 For details on both these interventions, see Sinclair Dinnen. See Stephen Ratuva for a Pacific perspective on the post-2001 interventions.

9 I am grateful to Rebecca Cole for pointing out the Orwellian tone of these phrases.

10 We can compare Marx's well known description in the Commodity chapter of *Capital*, Vol. 1, that use value is the 'bearer' (*traeger*) of exchange value.

11 On the Suharto state repression of the Free Papua movement in the 1990s see Jacques Bertrand.

12 Chandler notes that this situation has exacerbated the resettlement plans for asylum seekers in Manus Island, which is perceived as unfairly favouring foreigners. Reactions in Papua New Guinea to the 'Pacific Solution' have ranged from questioning whether a still fragmented and developing country can 'accommodate one more new tribe' (Zeriga-Alone 226), to a poem sympathising with the plight of 'boat people' (Landu 139).

13 Note, however, that the goal of the West Papuan movement is not to secede from Indonesia to combine with Papua New Guinea, but to establish a new independent state. See Webb-Cannon's comprehensive article on Papua *merdeka*.

14 See Fry's 'Our Patch', as well as Perera's chapter 'Our Patch: Racial Horizons and the War on Terror.' Perera also draws the crucial connection between discourses of 'failed states' in the Pacific region and the internal 'failed state' of Australian indigenous people.

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The Fiction of Aftermath: Public Art, Public Imagination and the Aesthetics of Anthropogenic Crisis

By Verónica Tello and Laura Fisher

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What contribution can public art make to public understandings of climate change? Posing such a question opens the door to well-traversed debates regarding the social role and political aesthetics of art, and specifically, art's capacity to engage the public in pressing local and global crisis. But the concern here is not whether public art can generate any tangible outcomes or social benefits in relation to Anthropogenic crisis as has been the purview of some recent research in the field of socially engaged eco-art (Mar, Lally, Ang and Kelly). But rather how, within the context of current and immanent ecological crisis, art may catalyse critical, affective conceptions of climate change on the level of the imagination. To this end the imagination is not to be treated as something that mediates the interior of the mind and the exterior of the world but rather, as an affective force that underpins our relations with the world and the discourses through which we make meaning of our everyday lives (Yusoff and Gabrys). Adopting such an approach is critical to understanding what can be described as the futurist orientation of climate change, because, as Yusoff and Gabrys argue, 'the imagination not only shapes the perception of climate change but co-fabricates it in ways that effect the possibilities to act upon it' (520).

In this light, this essay is specifically concerned with the ways in which public art is in dialogue with political rhetoric and media imagery to shape imaginings of climate change. Thus, it takes into consideration the wider field of discourses that shape public perceptions, and proceeds from the premise that art does not have a monopoly on aesthetics, but is rather competing with forms of knowledge production and transmission in the public arena that also have aesthetic capacities. This means that it seeks to interrogate how anthropogenic crisis and its dominant narrative of climate change are given cultural meaning and communicated in the public arena, drawing upon both sociological and art theoretical understandings of the relationship between aesthetics and social change. It focuses on one specific public artwork, *Activate 2750* (2009) [**Figure 1**], by the Australian artist Ash Keating, and one specific aspect of climate change politics that is central to this work: catastrophe and apocalypse. Ultimately it argues that through Keating's fictionalisation of apocalypse, *Activate 2750* offers the public an opportunity to engage with the figure of catastrophe in a manner that, however dystopian, is not constrained by the moral binaries which

frequently circumscribe public discussions around the future implications of climate change.



Figure 1: Ash Keating, *Activate 2750*, 2009. Waste installation, Penrith City Cultural Precinct, Thursday 5th March 2009.

Commissioned by C3West with SITA Environmental Solutions. Photograph: Alex Kershaw, © the artist. Image courtesy of the artist.

Climate Change and the Public Imagination

The anticipation of catastrophe is a recurrent theme in public discourses around climate change. It is an idea that is formulated in a variety of ways across the spectrum of scientific, political, advocacy and journalistic forms of communication through which citizens come to understand the impact of not just the increase in global temperatures as a result of carbon emissions but also the repercussions of industrial-capitalist patterns of consumption (Yusoff; Hoggett; Swyngedouw). It thus draws into its orbit a range of fears

around environmental and social change, including melting ice-caps and rising sea levels, extreme weather events, loss of biodiversity, water toxicity, and many other phenomena. The terrifying sense of momentum and inevitability that is generated by the concept of environmental catastrophe is partly attributable to the way scientists and advocates negotiate the protracted temporality and future orientation of the problem. In their efforts to persuade people of the urgent need to respond to a circumstance that does not yet shape their immediate experience, scientists and advocates provide predictions based on accelerating historical trajectories of transformation; and provide the public with facts and images about present forms of environmental change that are the consequence of past patterns of behaviour which cannot now be undone (Yusoff and Gabrys).

Images have played a key role in mediating the public's imagination of ecological crisis. One early illustration, in an activist context, dates from the first years of Greenpeace's campaign on the issue in the 1990s when it published *Climate Time Bomb: Signs of Climate Change from the Greenpeace Database*. The cover image represents a mirage like sphere that resembles both a setting sun and an atomic bomb mushroom cloud. In a less threatening manner, the image of the polar bear has recently been mobilised as a catalyst for raising climate awareness. As an icon of wild spaces that also invites sentimental engagement, the polar bear is now a potent signifier of species decline, melting ice and much else besides in international visual culture (Yusoff). Its magnetism as a means to make tangible the effect of rising sea temperatures illustrates the role played by popular aesthetics in determining how particular understandings of climate change gain purchase in the public imagination.

It is clear, however, that catastrophism has fomented responses that run counter to the objective of compelling people to take action. As Hoggett suggests in reference to both current climate change anxiety and previous eras in which apocalyptic thinking has entered the global social imaginary (such as the Cold War to which the Greenpeace cover image alluded), 'catastrophism is intimately connected to despair', an emotion that can counteract the very passion and sense of agency to which such discourses seek to appeal (271). He points out that this fatalism is made particularly acute due to the 'totalizing vision' of a vulnerable earth that is disseminated through climate change discourses (271). Similarly, Swyngedouw has suggested that 'apocalyptic imaginaries' of climate change futures are often 'populist and foreclose a proper political framing' (219). This is because they picture an undifferentiated field of crisis, rather than one in which the specific social, economic and environmental effects of capitalist systems can be reckoned with in concrete terms.

The ambivalent effects of assertions about the catastrophic effects of climate change in the public domain are of course also attributable to the

fact that they are explicitly entangled with discourses of morality. As Al Gore declared in his much quoted acceptance speech following his receipt of an Academy Award for *An Inconvenient Truth*, '[climate change] is not a political issue; it's a moral issue. We have everything we need to get started, with the possible exception of the will to act. That's a renewable resource. Let's renew it' (in Nagourney). Similarly, by calling one of his most recent books on the issue *Here on Earth: A New Beginning* (2010), the Australian scientist and climate change action advocate Tim Flannery exemplifies the redemptive inflection of many variations of climate change discourses (Hoggett, Wilson).

The discourse of catastrophe, and its configuration as morally implicating to the individual, has naturally made it a target of those discourses that dispute anthropogenic climate change. In Australia, this denial has been consecrated at the apex of the political system, having fuelled the strange series of events that led from the bipartisan negotiation of an Emissions Trading Scheme with then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and opposition leader Malcolm Turnbull in 2009, to the regressive policy landscape of the Abbott government (2013-15). During this period particularly, climate change catastrophism invited the allegation that scientists were extremists, zealots and crusaders (see for example Howard; Lloyd; Griffiths; Manne). These discourses frequently appropriate the trope of catastrophe to their own cause, broadcasting inverted images of disaster in the service of neoliberal opposition to policy action designed to reduce carbon emissions. As Abbott stated (as opposition leader) when he visited the steelworks in the South Australian town of Wyalla during the 2013 election campaign: 'Whyalla will be *wiped off the map* by Julia Gillard's carbon tax, Whyalla risks becoming a ghost town, an economic *wasteland* if this carbon tax goes ahead' (Pedler, authors' emphasis. For other examples see Wilkinson, Cubby and Duxfield; Manne: 44, 49).

Abbott's discourses gain their populist efficacy through their vernacular, concise and hyperbolic character, and their performative context—hard-hat and yellow vest among the workers. This form of communication requires 'minimal knowledge brokerage' and plays on the 'simple binaries of danger/safety, punishment/reward and complicated/simple' (Eckersley 392). Jeffrey Alexander theorises symbolic modes of communication proliferated in everyday discourse, through the media and political rhetoric, that characterise discourses of climate change. He points out that citizens daily encounter a variety of modes of performance, narrative, and symbolic and rhetorical forms of communication. Embedded within these forms are myths, metaphors and icons, all of which trigger a sense of affinity or aversion. As he points out, these idiomatic forms operate as symbolic codes which circumscribe the space of civic virtue and legitimacy in society, a circumscription that is realised through a variety of dichotomies: worthy or unworthy, rational or irrational, pure and polluting, and so on.

The persistence of conflict between these forms rests on the fact that no community has a permanent monopoly over the virtuous pole. As Alexander points out 'What is contested in the course of civic life ... is how the antithetical sides of the discourse, its two symbolic sets, will be applied to particular actors and groups' (64).^[1] This pattern of contestation is precisely what is at play in the conflict over climate change discussed above, and the mobilisation of visions of catastrophe by those who advocate for and against action on climate change. On the one hand, environmentalists and climate scientists point to scientific facts as the rational foundation of an imperative to act, and frame their arguments for the urgency of this imperative within appeals to consciences and willpower. On the other, climate change deniers characterise scientists and advocates as irrational and zealous and accuse them of making exaggerated claims that will encourage anti-democratic restrictions on liberty. Alexander's theorisation makes clear just why politics, as it is conducted in the public sphere, is often very far from rational decision-making and reasoned discourse. But it is nonetheless highly dichotomous—playing on the binaries of good and bad—and limited by the conventions and realities of consensus driven democracy.

Fictionalising: The Aesthetics of Climate Change and Public Art

With these brief remarks on way the idea of environmental catastrophe is configured in the public domain in mind, it is now worth returning to the question of what role art, public art in particular, might play in fostering an engagement with the inevitability of major environmental and social transformation on the level of the imagination. Numerous scholars have argued for the capacity of art to act as a powerful affective agent within the context of political events and social movements (Bennett; Papastergiadis; Demos). For example, philosophers such as Jacques Rancière argue for the role of aesthetics—a poetic and affective force and sensory experience—as a means to disrupt the 'distribution of the sensible' (what is possible to feel, do, see, and say). For such thinkers, aesthetics is more than capable of instituting a space that resists and complicates (for example) the rhetoric of politicians and mass media communication. However, as Rancière suggests, aesthetics is only a proper political art form if it disrupts the conventional expectations of political art (didacticism, moralising etc.), and leaves room for 'free play'. This is an aesthetic experience that moves the spectator to dissociate themselves from the given reality, and shift between one space/time continuum and another; between the aesthetics of art and the aesthetics of political rhetoric, enabling a different (complex) subjectivity and view of the world than is otherwise available.

This reading of the politics of aesthetics has become central to understanding how artists are able to engage global crisis. The challenges of global crisis, including climate change, would seem to demand from contemporary artists strategies that directly address the failures and omissions of the mass media and political rhetoric, adopting methods of *exposé* for example. Yet, many contemporary artists have instead privileged sensory, poetic and affective forms of communication that cut across the binaries of fact and fiction, offering highly speculative yet still convincing readings of the world (Tello; Demos 10). These practices, which can be described as practices of fictionalisation, have the capacity to breach the morally inflected dichotomies that frame adversarial public discourse. This is because, as Rancière suggests, fictionalising 'does not mean telling stories, it means constructing another sense of reality, another set of connections between spaces and times, between words and visual forms, spoken word and written words, between a here and an elsewhere, and a now and a then' (Rancière). Fictionalisation offers a means to reformulate existing discourse and establish a field for new narratives that diverge from the continuum of the 'sensible' (what is given). Rancière elaborates:

Critical art must negotiate the tension that pushes art towards 'life' and which, conversely, separates aesthetic sensoriality from other forms of sensible experience. It must borrow the connections that provoke political intelligibility from the blurry zone between art and other spheres. And it must borrow the sense of sensible heterogeneity that feeds the political energies of refusal from the isolation of the work of art. It's this negotiation between the form of art and thus of non-art that permits the formation of combinations of elements capable of speaking twice: from their readability and from their unreadability. (84)

This is how artists who work 'between art and other spheres', instantiate a different kind of imaginary into the public arena. Such artists effectively conjure evocative and provocative fictions which allow the public to imagine and speculate, which leave room for ambiguity and uncertainty, and which question and negotiate 'reality'. 'Fictionalising', in other words, is an aesthetic practice that produces narratives and images of urgent social and political phenomena that are in conflict with the rhetoric and visualisations of politicians and the mass media. It is in this light that Keating's *Activate 2750* can be seen to be an exemplary public artwork, especially since it directly addresses idea of apocalypse and catastrophe in relation to the Anthropocene. Before elaborating on how *Activate* generates a fictionalisation of the apocalyptic dimensions of climate change—as a means to contest, in a poetic and forceful manner, the discourse and aesthetics of climate change denial—some background to Keating's practice is necessary.

Activate 2750



Figures 2-3: Ash Keating, *Support Can Make the Difference*, 2006. Photograph: Andrew Noble. Image courtesy of the artist and Fehily Contemporary

Keating's practice is very much affiliated with the concerns of ecologist groups in Australia and elsewhere that have focused on environmental issues that arise in advanced industrialised societies. Keating's mother, Pam Keating, was a prominent figure in the Australian environment movement, and in 2002 the artist began working for her waste audit and consultancy company. Here he was responsible for visually assessing the amount of commercial and industrial waste sent to landfill. 'This experience', explains Keating, 'opened my eyes to the disregard that industry in general has for sustainability' (Keating). In subsequent years, his practice began to echo themes explored in the emergent field of waste studies, in which landfill is investigated as a repository of society's discarded objects; and a space for critical and creative practice that allows us to re-think human/non-human relations to waste (Reno). Between 2005 and 2007, for example, Keating undertook a series of performances that involved embedding himself in piles of discarded vinyl billboard posters (drawn from the debris of the 2006 Commonwealth Games) [**Figure 2, Figure 3**], appearing like a 'waste creature' to unsuspecting crowds in Melbourne's Central Business District (Gardner 45). Other works which engaged with waste as a sculptural and performative medium followed in May and August 2008 with *2020?* [**Figure 4**] and *Label Land*. Here, the artist worked with SITA Environmental Solutions to construct an enormous monument to consumer waste in Melbourne's Meat Market and a series of public performances in Seoul's shopping district using the discards of clothing manufacturers, respectively.



Figure 4: Ash Keating, *2020?*, 2008. Photo: Ash Keating. Image courtesy of the artist.

Following these projects, in October 2008, the C3West program (hosted by the Museum of Contemporary Art, Australia) invited Keating—and a range of other contemporary artists—to submit a competitive proposal for a project that could address unsustainable waste practices in Penrith. The project would involve the artist working in collaboration with SITA Environmental Solutions. SITA manages three waste management sites in Western Sydney and wanted to work with C3West in order to raise awareness about its work in the local community. Such collaborations are increasingly common as a means to generate ‘visibility’ for waste management solutions and to simultaneously democratise this process—artists and visual culture are of course seen to play a vital role in such ‘visualisation’ (Bennett, Miles).

To prepare his proposal for C3West, Keating travelled to Penrith—postcode 2750—numerous times throughout November 2008. He concluded that like many other suburbs, ‘Penrith is a consumption Mecca swamped by superstore complexes and an enormous shopping plaza. The centre of the city is marked by the Penrith City Council, the Joan Sutherland Performing Arts Centre and the Westfield shopping centre’ (Keating). He envisaged that

he could 'activate' these key public spaces and commercial areas by bringing them into closer proximity with the area's waste and landfill that is usually located out of sight and mind at the SITA landfill in Kemps Creek.

In turn, Keating organised three SITA trucks from the Davis Road Transfer to dump a selection of waste in the front lawn of the Joan Sutherland Performing Arts Centre, a prominent part of Penrith's city centre [Figure 5]. The waste had been selected and intercepted by Keating and his assistant Rus Kitchin over a period of two weeks: every day at three in the morning they travelled to the Transfer Station, accumulating 52 square meters of waste to be used for *Activate 2750*. The materials used included wooden pallets, fabric, cardboard, timber, hard plastics, rolls of paper and rubber belting (amongst other waste). By making this selection, Keating intended to underline how that which is often deemed 'waste' is in fact often recyclable and usable material. As two tradesmen commented with regard to the materials used in *Activate 2750*: 'We could reuse just about everything in there' (Mar, Lally, Ang and Kelly 42).



Figure 5: Ash Keating, *Activate 2750*, 2009. Transformers intercepting waste material. 4-7am Friday 20th February, 2009.

Commissioned by C3West with SITA Environmental Solutions. Photograph: Alex Kershaw, © the artist. Image courtesy of the artist.

Art and Waste

Keating's practice can be seen as emerging out of a long genealogy of art concerned with the aesthetics and politics of waste. This genealogy spans the avant-gardist practices of the Dadaists, Surrealists and Arte Povera and is characterised by a consistent focus on mining the ephemera and discards of modern industrialisation. Artists in this aesthetic tradition recalibrate, recode and reanimate waste to find new values and meanings in the material that is pushed to the margins of the mainstream (Whiteley 11-30). Such a genealogy can also be seen to include neo-avantgarde, post-war practices such as Allan Kaprow's New-York-based Happenings. In *Yard* (1961) Kaprow created an environment from used car tires, inviting the public to play with the discards of a hyper-consumerist society (similar strategies and affects were generated by Claes Oldenburg's *The Store*, 1961-2). In the same era, a wave of artists residing in the San Francisco Bay Area began to work with waste, developing a distinct aesthetics of recycling which was very much informed by the environmental policies and programs being developed by the city at the time (Whiteley 59). In these contexts artists would offer 'gifts' to the public in the form of usable waste, for example by leaving discarded but functional second hand electrical goods on the sidewalk. An awareness of the politics of waste—which emerged out of the American post-war consumerism boom—and the necessity to produce new models of exchange and everyday practices is also seen in Mierle Laderman Ukeles *Touch Sanitation* (1978-80). Fundamental to *Touch Sanitation* is the imperative of caring for and maintaining the city in order to develop a sustainable urban ecosystem, while the work also addressed the need to shift public attitudes towards garbage and those who work with it, namely, garbage collectors (Conte).

Certainly, a work such as *Activate 2750* can be seen to be part of this trajectory of waste-focused art practice. Like Ukeles' *Touch Sanitation*, it attempts to engage the public and challenge conventional notions of waste, all the while critiquing modes of consumption common in industrialised societies (as found in Kaprow's Happenings, for example). It does so with the kind of eco-consciousness that has its roots in the environmentally aware practices of artists from the San Francisco Bay Area (like Bruce Conner); but it also necessarily positions itself in its proper historical moment: it is contemporaneous with the specific discourse of climate change and a wave of projects that take as their theme the dialectics of anthropogenic crisis and the relentless advent of industrialisation (Miles).

In this sense, it is no surprise that critics of Keating's work, including *Activate 2750*, have predominantly focused on the artist's commitment to ecological and environmental concerns and his desire to raise awareness about the high levels of capitalist consumption in Australian suburbs and cities (Moncrieff; Mar, Lally, Ang and Kelly). As Keating himself has stated 'everyone is implicated, including myself, in being part of this type of society ... Being able to bring this project [*Activate 2750*] to

Sydney's west is a way for me to be able to open up a dialogue about the way in which we live' (Keating).

Art, Waste and Apocalypse

While raising awareness is certainly one function of Keating's work, as Amelia Barikin argues, Keating's work is most interesting because of its subtle thematisations of the experience of loss (20), and more precisely, loss in the era of the Anthropocene: being at the end of time. It is significant, for example, that the series of inter-related works *Activate 2750, 2020?* and *Label Land* were developed in the years immediately following the release of Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006) when the discourses around environmental catastrophe were intensifying globally. In Australia, for example, the Garnaut Review reports in 2008 underlined the vulnerability of Australia to the effects of global warming. The impacts of the heightened public consciousness of the idea that environmental catastrophe was imminent would inevitably come to shape the artist's practice. For his more recent work, *Gardensity*, commissioned as part of the 2011 Scape Public Art Biennial in Christchurch following the city's devastating earthquake, Keating became attuned to parallel emergencies around the world: the Icelandic volcano, the Japanese earthquake and the Fukushima nuclear disaster. He states that in the midst of these events, 'I started looking into prophecies around the end of the world, December 21, 2012' (Barikin 21).

The Fiction of Aftermath



Figure 6: Keating, *Activate 2750*. Waste pile, Penrith City Cultural Precinct, Wednesday 4th March 2009.

Commissioned by C3West with SITA Environmental Solutions. Photograph: Alex Kershaw, © the artist. Image courtesy of the artist.



Figure 7: Keating, *Activate 2750*. Procession 1 – Mulgoa Road Superstore District, Penrith, Tuesday 3rd March, 2009.

Commissioned by C3West with SITA Environmental Solutions. Photograph: Alex Kershaw, © the artist. Image courtesy of the artist.

Activate 2750 offers a means to imagine, live with and, more to the point, fictionalise the chaotic and unpredictable forms of life that will emerge as a consequence of climate change inaction [**Figure 6**]. As part of this artwork, the public would have witnessed, for example, Keating and collaborating performers draped in large colourful commercial banners walking through the Western Sydney suburb of Penrith and its commercial road, eventually entering into Westfield Shopping Centre [**Figure 7**]. They soon enter the suburban plaza—multiple levels of chain stores (Big W, Franklins, Myer, Target and Woolworths and Hoyts cinema)—pushing shopping trolleys—or ‘waste sculptures’—brimming with commercial detritus, strangely reconfigured for a world unknown. Keating and collaborators traverse the vast spaces of Westfield’s hallways and food courts, and move up and down its escalators, in militaristic uniform lines [**Figure 8**].



Figure 8: Keating, *Activate 2750*. Procession 3 – Westfield Penrith Shopping Centre, Penrith, 4:00-6:00pm Thursday 5th March, 2009.

Commissioned by C3West with SITA Environmental Solutions. Photograph: Alex Kershaw, © the artist. Image courtesy of the artist.

Leaving Westfield, the creatures soon re-enter the streets of Penrith and return to what appears to be their home or site of worship: a monument to waste contained by fencing that, in Keating's words, comprises 'an apocalyptic zoological habitat'. Its arrangement was in some ways responsive to the fact that Keating had been advised by council that the pile of waste would need to be 'contained' by a fence for safety reasons, a decision that is illustrative of Mary Douglas' argument that we are threatened by those objects which have been absorbed into the category of 'waste' (160). Keating decided to capitalise on the cultural meaning communicated by this demarcation and placed a second fence within the contained area to create a rat run. Outside the fencing, we see the *zombie-like figures*—performed by Keating alongside local choreographers and artists—silently standing in line, before entering the hazardous site one at a time in ceremonial procession. They soon begin to surround the installation in a large circle, performing a series of repetitive movements that reflect the sounds of machinery and mechanical glitches, before kneeling down to rest by the mountain of waste as night begins to fall **[Figure 9]**. Through their strange vitality we recognise that, far from presaging the suffocation of life by waste, or imagining the elimination or useful repurposing of waste, *Activate 2750* imagines waste as resilient and abundant. This waste has in fact spawned a new kind of synthetic, parasitic life that is in keeping

with the models of biodiversity that we can come to anticipate in future climates (Yusoff). In this sense, *Activate 2750* generates a fictionalisation of not only ecological catastrophe, but an evolution of life at the end of the Anthropocene. Keating's work elicits the sense of being engulfed by waste that is not only frighteningly voluminous—a kind of post-consumerist sublime—but is also generative of something non-human, it inhabits both the concerns of the present and the future—of what we are and what we might become.



Figure 9: Keating, *Activate 2750*. Final Procession – Penrith City Cultural Precinct, Friday 6th March.

Commissioned by C3West with SITA Environmental Solutions. Photograph: Alex Kershaw, © the artist. Image courtesy of the artist.

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Activate 2750 confronts citizens with the dissonance of a political art through its many-faceted fictionalisations of apocalypse, offering another way of imagining what the future may (and may not) hold. While its many elements have terrific affective and imaginative force, there are no appeals to notions of virtue or reason, no morally inflected allusions to catastrophe.

The convergence of seemingly absurd artistic performances, scenarios and installations within Australian suburbia infects the continuum of everyday life and provokes forms of intelligibility and experience which intermingle with and challenge homogenising and reductive readings of climate change, as propagated through opinion polls, sound bites and moralistic political campaigns. It fictionalises our world and its complex aesthetics and discourses, to proffer one vision of the future where we are as much at the 'end of time' as we are 'out of time'.

In this sense, the significance of Keating's work rests not only in its capacity to mediate and critically intervene in public imaginations of climate change including as they are shaped by the mass media and political rhetoric; or its engagement with the aesthetics of apocalypse in a playful and poetic form distinguishing it from the moralistic campaigns of many climate change activists. Keating's *Activate 2750* also, in fact, represents an emergent though still largely undertheorised paradigm of eco-public art. It shares a critical affinity with a handful of artworks, such as the Yes Men's *Survivalball* (2006), which have attempted to grapple with visualisations and aesthetics of anthropogenic apocalypse, distinguishing themselves from the kinds of projects that dominate this field. The global phenomenon of *Park(ing) Day*, for example, is an annual event that, since 2008, has mobilised thousands of people to create temporary 'parks' in car parking spaces in high-density areas as a means of contesting the erosion of 'green' spaces in cities (for more examples see *Curating Cities*). The socially inclusive and optimistic orientation of such projects register, at least in part, an effort by artists and art-commissioning bodies to counteract the negative political and populist perspectives that have such currency in the public domain. Even though the artist locates his work in that context himself (Keating), we argue that the aesthetics of *Activate 2750* do something else: like artists before him, such as Kaprow and Ukeles, Keating's work offers a creative-criticality toward waste pertinent to his time and political context. If this is no longer focused on explicitly mobilising the affective notions of 'sustainability' in industrialist societies or the 'care' of ecologies but, rather, on imagining the aftermath of the Anthropocene, then it is because new strategies are needed to effectively mediate perceptions and ways to inhabit a precarious present and future.

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Notes

[1] This is clearly illustrated by the universal appreciation of the dystopian vision of George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949): conservatives saw it to be a representation of the apparatus of communism, while other groups recognised it as a critique of the anti-democratic institutions of capitalism (Alexander 63-4).

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The View from Above from Below: Novel, Suburb, Cosmos

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Through convergent technologies of camera and flight, the view from above directs the opening chapter of *The Australian Ugliness* (1960), Melbourne-based Robin Boyd's famous critique of urban and suburban aesthetic forms. By 1960, such aerial vision was nothing new, but the arrival in 1956 of the Boeing jet meant air-travel was about to eclipse the sea voyage, conquering what Australian historian Geoffrey Blainey famously termed 'the tyranny of distance', and ushering in the era of mass tourism. This development naturalised and popularised an aesthetics of panorama that also organises the representation of suburbia. Boyd re-stages the aerial view successively. The visitor's first approach to Australia is from the north. Moving from Darwin to Bourke, the visitor crosses over country 'burnt brown and patchy, like a tender sunburnt skin, with sections of darker brown and blood red and blisters of lighter ochre'; his camera-eye view takes in the 'red backland of Australia' which 'looks from the air satisfyingly like its own maps' (Boyd 18).

The arrival of Boyd's hypothetical visitor, as noted, is staged twice, in the second instance tracking the plane's approach 'from across the Pacific' over 1950s pre-Opera-House Sydney. From the long high view, urban Australia presents a vision of 'continuity, unity and the promise of comfort in the mushroom roofs and the bright background of tended green'. Momentarily, suburban sprawl figures the 'love of home', with 'great speckled carpets spread wide around every commercial centre', becoming by night 'black velvet sprinkled wider with brilliant jewel lights than any other cities in the world' (40-1). Cities masquerade as harmonious parts of a continental whole even as the image of the 'carpet' evokes suburban domestication of the continent. From the orderly geometry on high, however, the visitor descends into chaos at ground level, into a *mise en abyme* of suburban featurism that proves at once fascinating and horrifying, with its 'battle of colours' and 'decorative iron skirmishes', its 'sandblasted koala bears' and 'yacht-race scenes' on windows, and 'black plastic silhouette cockatoos featured on the feature doors' (40-1).

Suburban panorama is generated by an 'aesthetic spectatorship' aligned with the cosmopolitanism vividly glossed by Bruce Robbins as the 'luxuriously free floating view from above' (Robbins and Cheah 2-4), or from what Heinrich Heine calls the 'kingdom of the air' (Beck 25). An implied

cosmopolitanism directs not only the panoramic view but also the ground-level perspective. Professional duty requires Boyd's visitor to spiral into the midst of ordinary detail, where baroque explosions of kitsch disrupt modernist surfaces. Recoil rapidly switches to scopophilic desire as the gaze penetrates suburban interiors. The interior, however, proves depthless and resistant: it is only ever skin deep. Boyd's tropes of 'carpet' and 'desert skin' prefigure his book's preoccupation with veneers, with cloaking and camouflage as the twin strategies of featurism. Suburbia, nation and whiteness, the latter encoded in 'burnt desert skin', are satirically coupled few pages later when Boyd describes the interwar suburban housing palette of 'brown and cheese' as 'the cream Australia policy' (42). Boyd's modernist-inflected optics, in short, position suburbia as the organic built expression of an insular White Australia. At the same time, through its toggle between panoramic and ground level views (like the spatial dialectic described by Michel de Certeau 118), suburbia is constituted as a multivalent field, flexing both spatially and affectively between order and chaos, geometric panorama and sensory immersion, cultural critique and desiring attachment. Boyd's 1960s book speaks to a specific postwar moment in the critique of suburban sprawl, but also anticipates the ubiquitous, cinematic panorama of geometric suburban development that any Google image search of the word 'suburbia' displays today.

This mode of representing suburbia is not confined to visual fields and architectural writing. A similarly panoramic view is memorably deployed within George Johnston's 1964 novel *My Brother Jack*, published just four years after Boyd's book. Having clambered onto the roof of his house, Johnston's narrator and alter-ego David Meredith surveys his suburb from above:

... there was nothing all around me, as far as I could see, but a plain of dull red rooftops in their three forms of pitching and closer to hand the green squares and rectangles of lawns intersected by ribbons of asphalt and cement, and I counted nine cars out in Beverley Grove being washed and polished. In the slums, I reflected, they had a fetish about keeping front door-knobs polished, but here in the 'good' respectable suburbs the fetish was applied to cars and to gardens, and there were fixed rituals about this, so that hedges were clipped and lawns trimmed and beds weeded, and the lobelia and the mignonette were tidy in their borders, and the people would see that these things were so no matter what desolation or anxiety or fear was in their hearts, or what spiritless endeavours or connubial treacheries were practiced behind the blind neat concealment of their thin red-brick walls. ... There was not one tree on the whole estate. (271-4)

Summoning Patrick White's manifesto of 1958 in which a 'great Australian emptiness' spreads 'in all directions' ('Prodigal Son' 37), David Meredith's rooftop view is the culmination of his rising discontent and constitutes the novel's turning point. His worldly ambitions now appear false and

inconsequential, and his life a veritable cul-de-sac. His role as the golden boy journalist at the *Morning Post* has required submission to what he now recognises as a merely bourgeois milieu. His wife's tasteful domestic décor is no more than kitsch and his neighbours belong to the mindless herd. David is primed for this negative epiphany by his earlier visit to his colleague Gavin Turley's home. The cultured Turley is a Toorak-dwelling, cultivated and authentically literary figure. David's exposure to Turley's superior aesthetic in turn makes visible the crass vulgarity of his own suburban milieu. This iconic moment mobilises anti-suburban rhetoric as the signifier of a cultured, cosmopolitan view, and—in *My Brother Jack*—this henceforth propels Meredith away from parochial Melbourne and out of Australia. The optical shift, attributed to Boyd above and present in *My Brother Jack* (indeed across the Meredith trilogy as a whole), activates tensions between distant, panoramic prospects and ground-level action and narration. And yet this makes Johnston's representation of suburbia far more layered and ambiguous than usually acknowledged. In what follows, I consider how shifting views of Australian literary suburbia depend upon and mobilise various versions of cosmopolitan identity. My subsequent return to, and re-reading of, *My Brother Jack*, asking how it connects with suburban terrain, proceeds by way of comparison with a series of novels of suburbia by Johnston's successor, Melbourne-based author Steven Carroll.

As Andrew McCann argues (vii-x), suburbia is a field of signifiers rather than stable, pre-existing terrain, a point that arguably applies just as well to other semiotic fields like the bush, desert or beach. But by the 1950s and 1960s, the emergence of anti-suburban panoramics in the writings of White, Boyd, Johnston and others converged significantly with a broader cultural rhetoric circulating not only within Australia but also transnationally. In Australia, the critique leveled by anti-suburban intellectuals seemed to herald the subsequent cultural turn from Menzies-era Cold War conservatism towards Whitlamism—when the Labor Government led by Gough Whitlam (1972-1975) dismantled the discursive template, at least, of 'White Australia'. Postwar anti-suburban discourse—pro modernist but anti suburban modernity—had been instrumental, therefore, in advancing and articulating a new national narrative based on cosmopolitanism, multiculturalism and, arguably, postcolonialism. Beyond the 1980s, however, and ironically, with the postmodern spatial turn, these earlier critics of suburbia were in turn subjected to criticism by a new generation of scholars and intellectuals—figures like Hugh Stretton and Tim Rowse—who deemed 1960s-style anti-suburbanism to be the self-serving rhetoric of an elite professional class oblivious to the aspirations and lives of ordinary people. This class of urban dwellers, it was now alleged, had sought to distinguish itself as cosmopolitan from parochial suburban others, repurposing older discourses of the 'uncultured herd and us' (see Nichols and Schoen).

Lefebvrian and Foucauldian turns to spatiality (and Edward Soja's theorisation of postmodern urban geography) have supported more recent multi-disciplinary scholarly work on suburbs, on their histories, structures, forms and representation. Rejecting elitist (often implicitly modernist) anti-suburban paradigms, scholars have sought to map the complex cultural diversity of suburbs in phenomenal, ethnographic and historical terms. Re-appraisal of the cultures of suburbs is well advanced in the disciplines of urban studies, history and cultural studies. In Australia these include, to take just a few key examples, Graeme Davison's historiography of suburban ideologies, Amanda Wise's analyses of interethnic exchange in Sydney's inner west, and Fiona Allon's work on local suburban cultures, communities and real estate. At the same time, a new suburban chic is abroad in the arts, in photography, television, film and poetry, and via social media. Suburban chic coincides with suburban transformation and renewal. In this global, digital era, a post-suburban sensibility expresses itself through an inner-urban aesthetic, a café culture ethos that pervades suburbia, even as the suburbs themselves sprawl ever outwards or are subject to renewal and densification.

Despite these developments, an elitist anti-suburbanism persists, even flourishes, and is frequently directed, as Christy Collis, Simon Freebody and Terry Flew have observed, against newer suburbs on the outer urban edge. Clive Hamilton and Richard Denniss's *Affluenza* (2005) and Elizabeth Farrelly's *Blubberland* (2008) exemplify more recent critique of aspirational cultures of overconsumption, so often symbolised by, or geographically aligned with, outer-suburbia and its so-called 'McMansions'. While such works canvas important problems in contemporary urban and social planning, residual traces of that earlier view from above arguably reappear. The persistence of such a view is also necessarily conditioned by the post 1970s return to the city by the wealthier fraction of an educated and progressive, globally-connected middle class. This is not just an Australian phenomenon but transnational, heralded by urban activists like New York's Jane Jacobs (whose public planning impact could arguably be likened to that of Robin Boyd in Australia). Jacobs and her peers, wittingly or not, initiated the trend towards the recoding, gentrification and revaluation of urban space for progressive community and also, in consequence, as prized real estate (Gopnik). So even though suburbia-at-a-distance may be chic—prompting pastoral nostalgia (see Aiden Davison) or the fascinating spectacle of difference—actual suburbs in the present are all too often ignored and de-valued. The real-world picture of urbanisation is immensely complex, of course, and impossible to capture neatly here. But it is notable that in Australia's expanding seaboard cities, areas that in the postwar decades defined the suburban frontier now constitute an ageing middle zone undergoing massive redevelopment and densification. Outer suburbs meanwhile tend to be more ethnically diverse than those inner city suburban precincts famed for their (erstwhile) 'ethnic' character. Urban and

suburban spaces, subject to demographic flux and cyclical creative destruction, exist in dynamic interrelation. These urban dynamics are reshaping suburban environments in terms that outpace (rendering outmoded) earlier representations of suburbia even as the salience of such representation increases.

How are representations of suburbia considered in the discipline of literary studies? In the US and UK, renewed attention to fictions of suburbia is focusing attention on, among many other things, their significance for critical regionalism (Wilhite) and their performance of white anxieties about race and masculinity (see Kutcha; and Jurca). But apart from a burst of scholarly interest in the 1990s and some sporadic recent work, there has been negligible attention in Australia to suburbs as zones of literary significance. In 'Gerrymander' (1990), Robin Gerster's influential preliminary mapping of Australian fictions of suburbia, the view from David Meredith's roof is adduced as a signal example. Looking across an array of postwar novels by such writers as Johnston, Patrick White, David Malouf and many others, Gerster argued that an inner-city imagination had produced a snobbish cultural gerrymander against suburbia, one hostile towards and ignorant of the worlds, lives and perspectives of most Australians. Gerster's intervention was an important reference point for subsequent scholarly commentary on suburbia in Australian literature. Andrew McCann's 1998 work offered a more nuanced view of Patrick White's anti-suburban rhetoric as directed against an oppressive modernity and its hegemonic consumerism rather than merely an elitist spurning of ordinary suburbanites. Recent feminist analysis promises to broker some fresh perspectives (e.g., Burns) but critical focus overall has been trained on the question of whether Australian writers are for or against suburbia.

Why, beyond this brief 1990s flurry, has there been so little sustained interest in literary suburbia among Australian scholars? Do the proximity and ubiquity of suburbs make them harder to see than more distant and exotic subjects? Is neglect a function of the post-1970s urban-centrism of educated elites, gerrymandering literary critical scholarship as much as, or more than, actual fictional works under scrutiny? It is also true that nationally focused, area-studies approaches to Australian literary culture that conditioned pro-or-anti-suburban paradigms in the 1990s are now being eclipsed by transnational literary approaches. These and other factors may explain why Nathanael O'Reilly's *Exploring Suburbia* (2012) is the only monograph to date on Australian novels of suburbia. Even O'Reilly's book adheres to the terms set by Gerster in 1990. Nominating Johnston's *My Brother Jack* as foundational to the anti-suburban tradition in postwar Australian fiction, O'Reilly maintains that 'Australian writers who seek to write realistic fiction about their nation severely limit their choice of subject matter if they choose to disparage the suburbs and their inhabitants, or ignore them altogether' (O'Reilly 299).

Building on the recognition Gerster and O'Reilly, among others, accord to suburbia as a significant strand in Australian fiction, we can now shift the coordinates of debate beyond pro- and anti-suburban binaries. O'Reilly's statement, above, usefully mobilises a key distinction between the pejorative signifier 'suburbia' and the word 'suburbs'. The plural term points towards heterogeneity, difference and multiplicity but also, paradoxically, to the locally specific. For O'Reilly, writers have been overly concerned with *suburbia*, understood as a target of scorn, but blind to real suburbs. If we follow this lead and attend to the traces of 'suburbs' in novels, a far more capacious fictional terrain unfolds. Suburbs are everywhere in Australian fiction. The word 'suburbs' both extends the range of applicable texts and suggests new coordinates for re-reading and re-thinking even those novels that are most demonstrably anti-suburban, including *My Brother Jack*. Insofar as 'suburbs' are imagined instead of, or as well as, 'suburbia', the field of representations is established much earlier than the 1960s and spans a wider diversity of writers, genres and preoccupations. While novels dealing with *suburbia* may refract or resist cosmopolitan elitism, if we limit the focus to their pro- or anti-suburbanism we are at risk of reproducing yet another 'view from above'. Delimiting these novels according to whether they are for or against suburbia is to reduce the complexity of their storyworlds and their modes of narration, and to restrict their manifold textual possibilities.

If we provisionally uncouple novels from their (obvious) ideologies of suburbia, other questions arise. First, how do novels map and reconfigure the raw material of real suburbs? Can we read novels, against the grain of their evident anti-suburbanism, for their evocation through time of suburban places and communities? Considered nationwide and across a century, novels summon a myriad of suburbs, albeit fictively transformed or disguised places that are, nonetheless, capable of conjuring memory, or of catching place in the 'aspic' of narrative time (see Carroll, 'Blue Suburban Skies'). Could these fictions represent an imaginative archive of suburbs lost, forgotten, or irrevocably transformed? Could they form a fictive map through which to glimpse historic processes of urban transformation as these condition suburbs, regions, hinterlands and cities? What if we read novels, regardless of whether they happen to be for or against 'suburbia', as maps of suburban place and time? And what happens to our understanding of both novels and suburbs if we trace textual coordinates and conjunctions into the world that sourced them, and then turn back again, rereading their fictional topographies?

This latter question leads to another: in what sense, and with what effects, might suburbs themselves occasion and shape novelistic projects? This is more elusive, but we might consider novelistic treatments of suburban locality as conditional upon or even integral to transnational reinventions of literary form. The suburb affords an inherently unstable chronotope as a

space-time figure capable of refracting successive phases of modernisation. Suburbs are both the built manifestation of more abstracted forms of global capitalism and localised vehicles for the gritty, resistant and sensory phenomena of everyday life. The suburb doubles as the site of primal experience, of individual memory, and at the same time it belongs to that series of abstracted, social and cultural forms, those gridded spatialities and subjectivities, that have taken shape under various phases of capitalism. In other words, literary scholars, in their local contexts and elsewhere, could seek to investigate how writers have contributed to the 'morphology of the novel' (Mead 13) by examining the suburb as a key scene for negotiating transnational forms that enact local-global dynamics, exercising the simultaneities of here and there, now and then.

Suburbs are primary sites of vernacular modernity imbricated in globalisation. Ulrich Beck's model of 'cosmopolitanisation' offers a way of thinking the local-global dynamic not only with respect to suburbs themselves but also to novels about suburbs. Beck's 'cosmopolitanisation' is not about reinforcing but rather resisting the nation-state's tendency to confine identity within fixed, hierarchical territorial boundaries—a model cognate with the critical 'cosmopolitics' advocated by Robbins and Cheah (8). Cosmopolitics or cosmopolitanisation reconceive cosmopolitanism as critical method, encouraging attention to interconnectedness and the fluidity of social space. The shift to 'cosmopolitanisation' emphasises process, generating a 'frame of reference for empirical exploration of globalization from within, globalization internalized' (Beck 25-6). These models envisage a dialogic imagination able to presuppose, among other things, the 'imagined presence of geographically distant others and worlds' (Beck 31). Subverting elitist cosmopolitanism by envisaging avenues for subaltern resistance to the totalising frames of the nation-state, these models seem more than a little conducive for literary works given that the latter—as McCann's reframing of Patrick White's suburbia insists—often express resistance to (rather than mere collusion with) hegemonic interests. This is what emerges from the work of Rebecca Walkowitz in her book *Cosmopolitan Style* (2006), which considers how the literary styles of both the early twentieth century modernists and late twentieth century postmodernists enable politically progressive negotiations of 'cosmopolitanism'. In this light, reading the fictions of suburbia requires openness to the workings of the dialogic imagination, to narrative experimentation with modernist simultaneities, to the flexing of the view from both above and within the suburban house, from above and within the suburb, and with attention to locations, near and far, that may be juxtaposed with or threaded into these spaces.

The flexing of perspectives that so often characterises novels of suburbia is in one sense expressive of, and correlative with, modernity's local-global dialectic. This dialectic is coupled with another, albeit one structural to

fictional narrative *per se*, but with specific purchase in novels of suburbia: that is, the dialectic of the real and the imagined, the play across the unbridgeable gulf between cosmos and heterocosmos. Suburbs, needless to say, exist in three-dimensional space as built physical things, whereas novels only conjure mental images of 'other' fictional worlds. Even so, there is a close relationship between suburbs and novels, since both have functioned, historically, as vectors for colonial, and capitalist, modernity. Their obvious ontological divide notwithstanding, novels and suburbs are serial forms (printed book, generic pattern, prefabricated design, gridded system) that travel through, and help create, global space. Both are vehicles for transnational modernity even as, and because, they take root in and adapt themselves to local conditions. In novels, as the work of Susan Stanford Friedman suggests, geographically diverse, localised coordinates are implicated in and shape travelling forms of modernism. In their different domains, novels and suburbs are each concerned with the partitioning of social space, with movement between interiors and exteriors, privacy and publicity, mobility and rootedness. Might we, then, rethink literary works about suburbia—via the dialogic imagination—as inherently linked to a critical cosmopolitanism, being on the one hand shaped by global modernity and on the other hand offering resistance to that modernity?

A local-global dialectic, a dialogic imagination and a vital interest in the relation between suburban space-time and narrative form all characterise Steven Carroll's fiction. In his cycle of six planned volumes (five are published to date) Carroll remembers and fictively renders the northern Melbourne suburb of Glenroy in both its change and continuity across time. Carroll's suburbia novels are powerfully elegiac in their summoning of lost suburban place. *The Time We Have Taken* (2007), the Miles Franklin Literary Award winning third novel, is set in 1970, the year the Beatles broke up, as Australian Labor Party leader Gough Whitlam's political star is rising—yielding a confluence of energizing generational change and bitter-sweet nostalgia typical of this novel. Carroll's central character and implied alter-ego, Michael, is a self-confessed 'nostalgic type' (32), 'habitually fatalistic' (37). In this third novel, we meet him on the cusp of adulthood, just graduated from university and now a teacher of high school English. In ironic counterpoint with the omniscient third person narrator, Michael obsessively anticipates both the demise of his relationship with his sweetheart, Madeleine, and the end of an era. We are told of novels Michael is reading that complement and frame the ordinary suburban world even as he moves away from these origins (and simultaneously returns to them). Reading his way through George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, and fiction by Somerset Maugham, Michael happens at last upon *My Brother Jack*. Johnston's novel is, for Michael, an 'event', allowing him to see 'for the first time in his reading life the world from which he comes' (201). At the same time, as the narrative informs us:

He does not know that the writer, this George Johnston he has only just heard of, is a dying man living his last days in Sydney and who saw his death foretold in X-rays the previous month while Michael bared his unfashionable jealousy for Madeleine to see. Two people cross a tram and enter a picture theatre; a dying man, skin on a stick, refuses to enter a hospital because he wants to die among friends; the book he wrote a few years before is thrust into Michael's hand from an unlikely source; and already the dying man lives on. (201)

This passage typifies Carroll's incantatory prose, aligning with his narrative method throughout of insistently threading together otherwise distant times and places. That Johnston died in 1970 exemplifies the way Carroll's fiction continually maps itself onto the scaffold of real historical place and time. Together with its modernist flexing of space-time simultaneities, the novel folds fictional and real worlds into intricate metafictional patterns.

Carroll is by no means uncritical of his precursor, George Johnston, of the latter's seemingly scornful dismissal of ordinary suburbanites. He clearly recognises the limitations imposed by the postwar anti-suburban rhetoric of which *My Brother Jack* is such a famous example. Even so, Carroll cites Johnston's novel as crucially significant in animating and enlivening Melbourne's suburban terrain. Carroll's fictional character Michael, likewise, gravitates to Johnston's novel because it so vividly conjures the everyday world of his familiar experience. Like *My Brother Jack*, Carroll's Glenroy novels both map and transmute the coordinates of their suburbs in and across time (see Rooney). It is in fact via their critical yet affective engagement with Johnston's fiction, and with the tradition that it represents, that Carroll's novels work to remediate Australian literary suburbia in what is currently, arguably, the present post-suburban moment.

Carroll is not just writing about suburbia: he is rereading it, challenging the homogenising panorama from above by inhabiting views from below and from within the narrow suburban plot that his characters traverse or to which they repeatedly return by bicycle, car or train, or in their minds. But it is precisely because of tensions between the views that are above, beyond and within the suburban 'rectangle no more than a mile long and a half mile wide' (Carroll, *Time*, 289) that Carroll's fiction aligns with Beck's cosmopolitanisation. The still life of the fictional suburb is transected by commodities and people, flows and desires, all emanating from elsewhere. There is Rita's dress that is too good for the street, the hum of radios and the vision of television, the spectacle of flash young men with their hi-fi record players, the danger and banality of trains and cars, the global provenance of visiting cricketing heroes and new immigrants who settle, not always easily, in the suburb. Carroll's third person prose weaves across the interior subdivisions of this landscape, pairing global and local, past and future. The ceaseless prospection and retrospection of his characters yield layered simultaneities, crossing spatial elsewheres with temporalities

beyond. If the suburb is a zone of perpetual transformation, a slow-motion catastrophe of inexorable progress, the fictional body constituted by the Glenroy series, with its modernist sense of time, yields a monumental stasis that works as a counterweight to the flux it otherwise conjures.

Carroll's literary project is double stranded: it presents the suburb as the site of abstract forces of progress, colonisation and globalisation but also, simultaneously, as the locus of memory and desire. It is a generative literary scene in which the inheritance of modernism is renegotiated and renewed for contemporary readers in what could be described as a positive reclamation of high modernism's other, of that more ambivalent category of the middlebrow. Carroll's negotiation of literary modernism for a broad contemporary readership is at its most explicit, however, in the cycle of novels he is currently writing, in tandem with his Glenroy novels, based on T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets* (1944). Two of four novels envisaged have thus far been published, with a third currently in train: [1] *The Lost Life* (2009) engages with Eliot's 'Burnt Norton' and *A World of Other People* (2013) with his 'Little Gidding'. Both create speculative biographical scenes that might be imagined as an originating source or backstory for each of Eliot's poems. *A World of Other People*—set just as the London Blitz comes to an end—tells the story of an ill-fated love affair between a young English woman named Iris and an Australian pilot named Jim. In both novels, a fictional version of Eliot appears as a stern, unspeaking but pivotal character around whom Carroll's other characters circle, as though around a monument. Of course Eliot is a monument of high modernism, and so represents, in Carroll's fiction, modernism's famed hierarchy of cultural values. Even so, and as we will see, Carroll's invocation of Eliot in this context is not only a critique, but yokes high modernism and suburban modernity together in terms that suggest their structural interconnection, their joint remaking and renovation of traditional forms.

Similarly monumental figures (also, like Eliot, objects of narrative curiosity) recur in Carroll's fictional universe. In the Glenroy cycle, the factory owner Webster, West Indian cricket celebrities, and the historical mountain of Whitlam enter into the ordinary suburban world as signifiers of exotic otherness, of progress or History. In *A World of Other People*, Carroll's third person narrative is chiefly focalised through Iris, a fictive version of the young Iris Murdoch. Because Carroll does not give Iris her family name, her resemblance to Murdoch remains coded rather than explicit in the text, and this is in contrast to the more obviously labeled, classified and distanced Mr Eliot. Iris and her friends see Eliot as a large ocean liner: cold, impersonal and remote. Fire-watching on the roof of the Faber and Faber building, in company with the famous man, Iris witnesses the momentary slippage of Eliot's public mask when a single plane in flames passes close overhead. Eliot becomes visibly animated as he sees the dove, painted on the side of the plane's flaming cockpit, 'ascending or descending' (41). Unaware of his

connection with this scene, one redolent of mystical epiphany and violent trauma, Iris subsequently encounters the plane's young pilot—an Australian, Jim, from Essendon—the sole survivor of the crash that follows. Severed by trauma from 'the world of other people', Jim dreams of visiting his parents asleep in their suburban home. Through Jim's dreams, Carroll's novel loops the tranquility of suburban Essendon into blitz-torn London. At the novel's climax, Eliot's public reading of 'Little Gidding', with its dove in flames ascending or descending, cruelly unlocks Jim's repressed memory. An alienating vision of self is unleashed as Jim sees that his private trauma has now been appropriated as a piece of arcana for Eliot's high modernist art.

Eliot's poetic appropriation of the pilot's trauma functions in the novel as an inverted mirror of Carroll's own fictional capture and recoding, across time and space, of Eliot's high modernist poetics for his own vernacular-modernist prose. This amplifies ironies already built in to the figure of Eliot himself as an Anglophile American who journeys to the metropolitan centre of English letters to reinvent himself, in the process suppressing his provincial origins. Drawn to yet critical of Eliot, Carroll's novel ultimately places itself on Iris's side. Iris finally imagines Eliot sitting in his Faber and Faber office, enjoying the aerial view, the panorama of the ordinary:

Perched at his desk. The bespectacled eyes forever seeking, the eagle's beak of a nose sniffing out, the quarry of the 'real thing', of the anointed, the chosen few of a new generation of poets from below ... he's up there, Eliot, where he will always be ... Above it all ... utterly above it all. Which is all the more reason, she declares, looking up, for these communications from below. (276)

Carroll's co-option of Iris Murdoch—whose philosophically engaged yet highly readable novels for an educated postwar readership met with significant commercial success—refracts something of his own project. Another figure in the story, Iris's betrothed Frank, adds to the novel's reflexive, metafictional scenario. Frank is a fictional compound of the Thompson brothers. Frank and nineteen-year-old Iris Murdoch were young lovers before Frank died a hero in the Great War, while his brother, the historian E. P. Thompson, went on to write *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963). *A World of Other People* inscribes itself into this history of challenge to high modernism's self-generated myth of elevation over mass culture. With its readerly accessibility, Carroll's novel—not unlike the short story that his character Iris writes and delivers to Eliot—communicates from below. It also looks back in time, and from its implied position 'down under', in contemporary suburban Australia. Taking advantage, perhaps, of Australia's invisibility in world literary space, Carroll's own poetics of time and space ironically mirror or double the poetics of high modernism. Circling the great modernist poet with skepticism, Carroll's novel separates Eliot's hierarchy of values from his

poetic energies, diverting these into the everyday, middlebrow forms of the contemporary novel. Carroll's negotiation of a middlebrow modernism through which the (Australian) suburb and the (English) metropole are dialogically co-constituted informs both his novel cycles, the Eliot cycle and the suburban cycle, weaving their separate strands together. Late in *The Time We Have Taken*, Carroll's narrative directly invokes Eliot's 'East Coker', from the latter's *Four Quartets*: 'The suburb ... lies still and silent, like houses gone under the sea' (229).

Just as Carroll's swerve away from Eliot also inscribes his return to Eliot's legacy, so also his suburbia cycle swerves away from as it returns to George Johnston's *My Brother Jack*, the inherently ambiguous founding text of Australian literary suburbia. In the wake of Carroll's fiction, we can now return to *My Brother Jack* to ask what else might be at work in its fictive map of suburbia. Borrowing from Boyd's tropes of surface and skin but recasting them in terms suggested by Vilashini Cooppan, we can attempt to 'skin the map' of Australian literary suburbia (Cooppan 8). Instead of simply occupying the position of the cartographer looking down from on high, Cooppan suggests placing oneself within the map and becoming alert to its ambiguities, flows and conjunctions, to the work of memory, to shifting scales and angles of view, to emotions and affect—to the full sensorium (8). How might we skin the map of literary suburbia within *My Brother Jack*? What of the narrative's folds, reversals and qualifications, its shifting perspectives, its multiple frames, and its sensory memories? Can we glimpse Johnston's suburbs from below or within rather than just from above?

When Johnston returned to Australia from the Greek island of Hydra, where he, Charmian Clift and their children had lived according to cosmopolitan and bohemian ideals for nearly ten years, he spoke about writing *My Brother Jack* from that distance in time and space:

I was homesick for my native land. As a way of trying to overcome the long dragging hours of confinement in a sickbed, I set myself the task of trying to remember a street in Melbourne I used to walk along in the early nineteen twenties, when I was a ten-year-old schoolboy. Although I had no distractions, it did not come easy. However, I persisted, and gradually—I thought at the time miraculously—the street assembled itself in my mind, bit by bit, shop by shop, house by house, the most minute detail, people and things I had not thought about for forty years. (Johnston, in Kinnane, 216)

To recall the Elsternwick of his childhood, Johnston conjures the embodied memory of street-level movement. He is in fact describing a trick of memory retrieval that he owed in the first place to Charmian Clift (Wheatley 430-4) but one that is also compatible with the ancient art of mnemonics used by literary modernists like Marcel Proust and Virginia Woolf. What he

delivers here is less a view from above than memory's processual re-inhabitation of three-dimensional space. Intriguingly, Steven Carroll attributes the inception of his own first Glenroy novel to a dream in which he walks with his parents along their street at twilight (Carroll, 'Blue Suburban Skies'). This becomes the spine for Carroll's plot, and for what ballasts the narrative tension between linear progress and simultaneity in the first novel, *The Art of the Engine Driver*, a pattern amplified across the series. Johnston's recollection of Elsternwick supplies *My Brother Jack* with Meredith's dreary inner-suburban, interwar childhood home of *Avonlea*, the character of which recalls Boyd's interwar 'cream Australia'. Yet later in the narrative this childhood suburb is re-evaluated by Meredith, and privileged over the new, hygienically modernist and bourgeois suburbia of Beverley Grove that he sees from his rooftop. As Robin Gerster points out, this modulation between older and newer suburbia is one of the key, recurring tropes of anti-suburban discourse in which the benign organic suburb of the past is valued over the soulless modern suburb of the present (568-9).

This always-already shifting terrain could prompt a further question: how might readers themselves imagine Beverley Grove, confronted with Meredith's description? In what terms might readers picture his suburban panorama? How might reader-generated internal images of suburban terrain compare with the actual suburban terrain upon which Johnston drew for his novel? Would it be literal-minded to skin the fictional map by paying a visit to the suburb on which the fictional Beverley Grove was based? Beverley Grove is a fictional version of East Brighton where George Johnston lived, in the 1940s, with his first wife Elsie Taylor. The Australian Electoral Roll confirms that Johnston did indeed reside at 7 Mackie Grove, East Brighton during these years. A visit to this location via Google Maps shows that Mackie Grove is now a heritage-listed street within the 'Cheeseman Avenue Precinct'. Mackie Grove is a quiet street, very leafy, and lined by lovely interwar modernist bungalows, evidently all built at the same time, showing uniformity in materials, style and presentation, but each featuring its own distinctive architectural variations:

The Cheeseman Avenue Precinct is notable for its remarkably intact inter-War residential aesthetic. Comprising almost entirely standard single plan, single-storey brick villas, the consistency of scale, setbacks and materials creates cohesive and homogeneous streetscapes with a high level of architectural integrity, enhanced by mature front gardens and intact front fences. (Bayside City Council)

The houses of Mackie Grove are very modest in size by comparison with contemporary housing stock and a long way from the images a contemporary reader might envisage if asked to conjure the suburbia of Johnston's fictional Beverley Grove. Mackie Grove in no way resembles my own teenaged imagining of the place on first encountering Johnston's book many decades ago. That internal reader's image refracted mid 1960s

Sydney housing stock, consisting of three bedroom, blonde brick-and-tile kit homes of the postwar era that constituted what is now deemed the middle-ring of Sydney's suburbs. Ironically, this is that same middle-ring of three-bedroom brick homes mentioned earlier, that is now ageing, under demolition, making way for larger houses that take up most of the block, or rezoned for high-rise dwellings. By skinning the map, by returning the novel to a street-level encounter with 'real' suburban terrain, something appears that had been hidden in plain sight: and that is that Johnston's novel is not leveled at the 1950s postwar suburbia of Robin Boyd's time, but remembers the late 1930s model that he, or at least his reader, tends to project forwards. In short, the coordinates of ordinary suburban places, past and present, could be mapped across Australian literature to yield a rich palimpsest created by the conjunction of novels with their suburbs.

At least two aspects of Johnston's *My Brother Jack* undermine its view from above: its act of narrative retrospection and the unreliability of its narrator. The view from above issues from David Meredith himself whose anxious discontent irradiates the narrative. This unreliability renders uncertain the novel's putative view of suburbia, decentering its ostensible anti-suburbanism—an anti-suburbanism that in part rebounds upon the narrator himself. Its retrospectivity, furthermore, summons a series of distant spaces and times. Johnston was writing about Melbourne from Hydra—at a time when the idyll of freedom and artistic community was already, according to Dalziell and Genoni, disintegrating. By now, moreover, the ideal village was becoming the focus of an international mass tourism flowing swiftly in the wake of its expatriate and bohemian *avant-garde*, a pattern that coheres entirely with histories of suburban development described by Lewis Mumford (559). From this 'long remove in time and space', however, Johnston's 'nostalgic looking back' is enabled by the fact, or fantasy, that, for the remembering writer, 'nothing of the present Australia [obtrudes] on the scene':

... one sees it perhaps a little bit out of true, out of perspective, but with ... almost a dreamlike clarity in a way, and it's terribly odd, the moment one sets oneself the exercise of examining this past time; in the beginning it is very very difficult indeed and then as you rather painfully evoke some early image it seems to breed the other early images and a most extraordinary chain of memories is in some curious way revived, sometimes quite frightening, and you find details seem to come up from some bottomless pond that one had for decades utterly forgotten—the names of people, their appearance, the clothes they wore, the streets, the little shops where one bought those long-vanished sweets, nullanullas and silver sammies and lamp posts and licorice sticks and so on, and all this comes up, and it comes up in a very fresh and strangely vivid way. (Johnston, Interview n.p.)

Johnston's writing of *My Brother Jack* in 1960s Hydra, remote from interwar Melbourne, yields the spectral doubling of time and place—and this is only

further amplified through both divergence and repetition across the remaining volumes in the trilogy: *Clean Straw for Nothing* (1969) and *A Cartload of Clay* (1971). In Benedict Anderson's terms, the textual pairing of these disparately located provincial communities—the suburbs of Melbourne and the island of Hydra—is inherently spectral; Anderson describes this 'incurable double vision' as like looking through the wrong end of a telescope that puts distant things in comparison so that they are at once both close up and far away (Anderson 4). In the Meredith trilogy, village and suburb shift, reconfiguring distances and times, forging mutual spaces of desire and nostalgia. The static enclosures of village or suburb, beheld from a distance, are broken by the movement, speed and change that condition them and that result from their serial nature, their globally interchangeable status. From this angle, and particularly when seen through the lens provided by Carroll's fiction, Johnston's trilogy is less the manifestation of a fixed cosmopolitan view than a refracted negotiation or mediation of the global and the local, since the one always inheres in the other. Across this combined fictive terrain, the dialogic imagination cosmopolitanises literary suburbia.

Cooppan's invitation to skin the map allows us to subvert the view from the kingdom of the air, to re-admit the sensory fullness yielded by the interaction of cosmos with heterocosmos, of novel with suburb, and reveals the ways in which global and local are already in a significant sense immanent to each other. As Robbins writes, 'If our supposed distances are really localities ... it is also true that there are distances *within* what we thought were merely localities' (Robbins 250). The dialogic imagining of global distances as already present in local proximities promises to open new dimensions within suburban worlds, whether those worlds are real or fictional. If so we can read the novel and the suburb together, dialogically, as always already cosmopolitanised, and cosmopolitical.

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Notes

[1] Personal communication with Steven Carroll: 15 November 2016.

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Introduction to Alan Brotherton's "'The Circumstances in Which They Come": Refiguring the Boundaries of HIV in Australia'

By Kane Race and Niamh Stephenson

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Alan Brotherton (1963-2015) was an Australian HIV educator and community activist who played a leading role in establishing and shaping community and policy responses to HIV/AIDS in Australia and internationally. He joined the HIV sector in the early 1990s, first as a community outreach worker for the AIDS Council of New South Wales (ACON), before going on to hold significant leadership roles in several AIDS organisations. Alan was instrumental in the establishment of the peer-based organisations Positive Life NSW and the National Association of People With HIV Australia (NAPWHA), serving as the president of NAPWHA in the late 1990s, and contributing significantly to the development and implementation of several of Australia's National HIV Strategies from the mid-1990s. In 2008 he joined the International HIV/AIDS Alliance in Brighton, England, where he facilitated community-strengthening programs in numerous countries, before moving to the role of Director of Policy and Communication for the International AIDS Society.

Alan returned home in 2010 to serve as Director of Community Services at ACON. He was diagnosed with a brain tumour in 2012. He continued work in the sector until his death in June 2015, survived by his partner of 15 years, Luke Cutler, his parents, brother and many friends and colleagues around the world who have been inspired by his energy and work. As an openly gay man who lived with HIV for 30 years, Alan drew on his situation to play a major role in devising and implementing policies and programs that responded pragmatically, sensitively and creatively to the presence of HIV within bodies, communities and societies around the world. Within the HIV/AIDS sector he was known as a highly professional, efficient and sensitive manager. This managerial proficiency was accompanied by an extraordinarily sharp intellect, generous inquisitiveness, and endless fascination with people, cultures and social dynamics. As Nicolas Parkhill, Executive Director of ACON put it, if Alan 'hadn't been a community advocate he would have made a good anthropologist'.

Foucault coined the term 'specific intellectual' to refer to thinkers whose interventions in circumscribed domains of a 'real, material, everyday' nature have 'global effects', making a difference in wider scientific, social and

political terrains (Foucault)—and this is how we have come to regard Alan’s contribution. With its complex and specialised forms of knowledge and expertise, the HIV/AIDS sector stands as a striking example of one of the demarcated domains of social activity that Foucault argued constitutes modern societies. From its origins in grassroots politics, the Australian response to HIV/AIDS evolved into a distinct sphere of governance, replete with its own administrative categories, sources of authority and representative structures (Ariss). The epidemic was carved up into distinct domains, organised around specific ‘affected communities’—gay men, sex workers, and people who inject drugs—conceived as discrete subpopulations with their own memberships, predispositions, social dynamics and spokespeople. This enabled what Rose and Miller call ‘governing at a distance’, a defining characteristic of neoliberal politics (Rose and Miller; Ballard). But the identification of discrete administrative categories and identities takes on particular significance in the context of threats to public health. As Robert Crawford has discussed, AIDS dramatically revealed how health can operate as both an identity strategy and a dividing practice. ‘Controlling a danger and policing a boundary are often one and the same’ (Crawford 403). The ascription of risk to bounded ‘communities’ has historically served to protect the self-conception of the ‘general public’ in Australia and many other countries

‘The circumstances in which they come’ is an essay Alan wrote while undertaking a Masters degree in Public Health in 2007. It analyses the political handling of a spate of new HIV infections over 2007, revealing how state and federal politicians deflected public anxieties and shifted responsibility for these infections by opportunistically and cynically converting them into investments in tighter border control. Border control has of course been a defining trope of Australian politics since Prime Minister John Howard’s assertion in the wake of 9/11, the Tampa and Children Overboard Affairs of 2001: ‘We will decide who comes to this country, and the circumstances in which they come’. But Australia’s efforts to stem HIV had rarely invoked immigration and border tropes before the events this essay relates, perhaps because of the epidemic’s historical appearance among gay male citizens and residents in this country. Indeed, with 80 percent of HIV infections occurring among gay and other men who have sex with men, Australia’s success in ‘containing’ the epidemic is frequently celebrated. Since the epidemic’s peak in the early 1990s, the borders of sexual identity have appeared sufficiently stable in the epidemiological and public imagination to offset any widespread anxiety about other varieties of illicit border crossing. By the turn of the millennium, the administrative categories of HIV had been so firmly established in the response to the epidemic, that the events Brotherton discusses in this essay scarcely registered in HIV sector discourse.

Today, questions of immigration, asylum and border are deeply etched in the national imaginary: Both major political parties—the Australian Labor Party (ALP) and the Liberal-National Coalition—have presided over sustained human rights abuses in offshore detention camps, apparently to dissuade people from seeking asylum in Australia. The passport control queues of our international airports have been rebranded with ‘Australian Border Force’ ribbons that evoke reality TV shows celebrating the ‘heroic’ escapades of military police in Australia’s immigration zones and territorial waters. In 2015, former Prime Minister Tony Abbott authorised Operation Fortitude, a blitz on downtown Melbourne that would have seen random on-the-spot visa status checks conducted alongside measures targeting ‘anti-social behaviour’, such as the use of sniffer dogs and random breath testing. This operation would have represented an unprecedented convergence of public health, public order and immigration technologies deployed to govern urban space, had it not been derailed by a rapidly mobilised flash-mob protest.

The governmental division of social life into discrete administrative categories is typically accompanied by the development of distinct domains of specialisation, and this is certainly true of the HIV/AIDS sector. This in turn effects the scope and framing of responses to risk, the thinking and activities it becomes possible to undertake, the way things come to matter. In saying this, we do not wish to downplay the heterogeneity of skills and expertise required of practitioners within any one domain. Over the course of his career, for example, Alan undertook activities as diverse as establishing rapport and conducting peer education with non-gay identifying men who were looking for sex in public parks; navigating the complex administrative protocols of the Therapeutic Goods Administration to ensure people with HIV/AIDS could access drugs through compassionate access schemes; engaging critically with medical and social researchers; overseeing the work of community-based clinicians, educators, support workers, managing budgets, dealing with bureaucrats, etc. But, with its careful attention to the displacements that can occur in the government of risk, this essay demonstrates Alan’s capacity to think across and against the administrative categories that organise the HIV sector. Given the increasing significance of logics of border control in Australian governmental discourse, the essay stands as a fascinating—and remarkably prescient—study of how governments handle and exploit the volatile symbolics of infection and containment.

Some months before his death Alan expressed a wish to develop this paper for publication. In preparing the piece for this journal, we changed very little beyond minor proofing and editing. We would like to thank Alan’s partner, Luke Cutler, and the editor of *Australian Humanities Review*, for helping in this process—we are happy to see this work reach a wider public.

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The Circumstances in Which They Come': Refiguring the Boundaries of HIV in Australia

By **Alan Brotherton**

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Introduction: the PM squares off with the queens

In early March 2007, Elizabeth Windsor, also known as Queen Elizabeth II, praised Australia during her state visit for its tolerance and compassion, going on to note that much more needed to be done to address HIV/AIDS in her realm and that people with HIV, with appropriate care and treatment, were able to lead long and productive lives. 'Ignorance and lack of understanding about these issues sometimes breed uncertainty, even fear and the inclination to turn from those who are unwell', she told a Commonwealth Day service at St Andrew's Cathedral. 'But we know, for example, that someone who is HIV positive can, with proper support, lead a full and rewarding life'.^[1]

Within a month, Australian Prime Minister John Howard, a man who has frequently declared his allegiance to the British monarch and who has actively campaigned to ensure her continuation as head of state, dismissed her praise and confirmed her concerns about ignorance and lack of understanding when, in response to a question on Melbourne's 3AW, he stated that people with HIV should not be allowed into Australia.^[2]

The comments elicited a barrage of criticism from senior figures involved in Australia's HIV response, less than flattering global media coverage^[3] and an embarrassed silence from Howard's Health and Foreign Affairs Ministers.^[4] However, the 'short, grey man in his sixties with a whiny voice' (as *The Times* of London had characterised Howard^[5]) persisted and raised the issue again in May, this time proposing a ban on short and long term visitors and residents with HIV. This time he was more successful in eliciting an outraged response from 'ordinary Australians', who wrote to newspapers and websites expressing their shock, horror and disgust at the prospect of diseased migrants being let loose among the populace. This attempt to explore the story's potential as a wedge issue for the impending election finally died out in the face of international opprobrium—including a damning editorial in *The Lancet*^[6]—and the humiliating prospect of a country renowned for its successful response to HIV being caught up in a reprise of its now discredited White Australia immigration policy, fuelled by

a distinctly 1980s-sounding AIDS panic, at precisely the time it hosted an international conference on HIV Treatment, Pathogenesis and Prevention (July 2007). A further attempt on Howard's part to reinvent this opposition, couched more aggressively in terms of the cultural incompatibility of Africans—and choosing as its target the Sudanese community, recently arrived from a brutal civil war—largely failed to make much impact. This striking instance of what Jayasuriya has termed the 'new racism' (Jayasuriya) was read by the majority of commentators—professional or otherwise—as yet another attempt to revive the politics of division and race that Howard had so successfully exploited in previous election campaigns. [7]

From an international perspective, the timing and content of Howard's comments must have appeared both bewildering and inopportune. However, Howard was playing to a local issue that had been simmering for some time. He was responding to attempts the previous day by the Minister for Health of the State of Victoria, Bronwyn Pike, to pin an increase in that State's HIV figures on inadequate immigration control. Pike was engaging in the time-honoured tactic of blame shifting between national and state governments in a desperate attempt to evade responsibility for the highly publicised failure of her department's capacity to manage individuals who placed others at risk of HIV, and more generally check the state's rising HIV notifications—up more than 100 percent since 1998. Just how desperate this attempt was became clear the following day, when it was clarified that of the 70 'immigrants' to Victoria, most were from other states of Australia, and of those from overseas, the majority were from New Zealand or Australians returning home with infections acquired overseas.

The responses to Howard's comments, and the way in which the crisis of confidence in public institutions played out, produced one of the first 'population wide' national debates about HIV in Australia for some years. In what could be seen as a less than edifying display, a range of attitudes and perspectives about HIV/AIDS, anxieties about borders, immigration, and contagion—of public institutions, of the imagined nation and the 'Australian way of life'—were articulated in letters pages and opinion blogs across the nation. However, it is notable that opposition to the notion of people with HIV being allowed to immigrate to Australia was by no means universal [8]—certainly not within Howard's cabinet or the professional HIV sector, but neither among contributors to letters pages and blogs. This paper seeks to analyse the debates around HIV, immigration and transmission in the context of concerns around Australia's territorial and national integrity, notions of contagion and contamination, and the management of risk.

'The good father of his family'

An important backdrop to these political machinations was the Victorian case of Michael Neal, a man frequently referred to in the media as a 'Coburg grandfather', who was alleged to have deliberately infected or attempted to infect with HIV scores of men, in circumstances described in lascivious and embellished detail by the otherwise sober broadsheets *The Age* (Melbourne) and *The Australian*. Neal went to trial in March 2007, only a short time before Howard expressed his stance on HIV immigration. But despite the lurid and sensational aspects of this story – given full tabloid treatment with headlines such as 'HIV man tricked sex slave', allegations of drug-fuelled orgies, the invention of a culture of 'bug chasing' among Melbourne's gay community^[9] and the forced resignation of the State's Chief Health Officer – the story about Michael Neal seemed to generate little public interest. Only one of the 15 or so stories on the case ever hit the top 5 or 10 'most viewed stories' lists in online editions of major daily newspapers, and few letters or emails about the issue were published. A search of newspaper databases for the period leading up to April 2007 reveals only a handful of articles, the majority written by professionals from within the HIV sector, attempting to correct some of the more fanciful narratives generated by journalists covering the story. A smaller number of letters, mostly from writers in Coalition electorates, sought to highlight the perceived administrative failures of [State Premier Steve] Brack's Victorian Labor government.^[10] However, there appears to have been only one letter that directly addressed the case itself. Peter McCallum wrote to the Adelaide Advertiser on April 6 to share his witty observation that 'An act of gay abandon could be the best way to describe how an HIV-positive man might have infected at least 16 men between 2000 and 2006'. The 'boom-boom' confidence of this utterance reflects the comfortable distance that is perceived to exist between what goes on 'over there'—the steamy world of gay sex—and what is imagined to be 'mainstream Australia'. Within a few weeks, there were further revelations that a South Australian man, Stuart McDonald, was currently being detained in relation to allegations of deliberate infection.^[11] However, these revelations also failed to elicit much in the way of public debate.

It was not until the PM made his comments that a wider public reaction was invoked; and although he mentioned TB in the same breath—a far more infectious disease and one which is harder to avoid than HIV—it was not TB but HIV which drew a range of largely hostile and exclusionary responses. Indeed, this hostility was quite marked and excessive relative to the level of risk that could possibly be borne by even some hundreds of individuals with HIV entering the country to live.^[12] Given that surveys consistently show a high level of awareness of HIV and the means by which it can be avoided, this response clearly points to the cultural and political nature of perceptions of risk. The perception of risk here was not ever that of a significant or realistic fear of any individual contracting HIV as a consequence of the entry into the country of HIV positive migrants, but

rather the threat of cultural and moral contagion to 'the Australian way of life'—themes put into play by the PM and picked up by a protectionist and isolationist political force in the form of Pauline Hanson's re-emergence onto the Australian political scene. Hanson had reprised her 1998 electoral campaign comments [13] about diseased migrants in late 2006, initially focusing her concerns on the free passage of PNG nationals across the Torres Strait into Australia and calling for stricter border controls. It is entirely possible that Howard's political antennae were attuned to the xenophobic possibilities inherent in Pike's comments. The perceived dangers of immigration, and the free movement of labour as a result of globalisation, is one which the then incumbent national government had played on significantly over the years, even as it engaged in trade and other agreements which opened up the country to such movements. Pauline Hanson soon shifted the focus of her concerns to Africans with AIDS, [14] no doubt inspiring Howard's persistence with the issue (he reiterated his views in May 2007, despite advice from his Health and Foreign ministers to the contrary) and ultimately generating a short-lived and electorally unfruitful germ panic. [15]

Gay Africa

The timing of Bronwyn Pike's statement, against a background of concern over the capacity of authorities to effectively manage the behaviour of an alleged sociopath with an overtly stated motive to infect, was such that notions of sexual predation—historically ascribed to the abject figure of 'the homosexual'—and immigration of people with HIV were powerfully conflated. While the majority of people infected with HIV in Australia are men who have sex with men, and HIV is often referred to as 'contained' within this community, potential immigrants with HIV appear to be read as heterosexual and from developing countries. The majority of blog comments suggested the stereotypical HIV positive immigrant is African. This is the result of a consistent conflation of (heterosexual) AIDS with Africans, and the application of a model of 'containment' of the Australian epidemic which renders the gay community an imagined site of disease prevalence which is at once safely contained 'within' the nation, yet constituted as a place apart. This view is exemplified by Sarah Bambery of Glen Waverley, who wrote a letter to *The Age* on April 6 that stated 'as a year 12 student, I have been shocked to learn there are high rates of HIV in Victoria and that the numbers are rising. Obviously sex education in schools is not effective. For many students, AIDS is something we associate with the United States and African countries. We are aware that HIV-positive people exist elsewhere, but schools do not focus on it'.

Writing in 1989, Cindy Patton argued

the very labeling of 'African AIDS' as a heterosexual disease quiets the Western fear that heterosexual men will need to alter their own sexual practices and identity. If the proximate (homosexual) AIDS allows such men to ignore their local complicity in 'dangerous' practices that lead to the infection ('their') women, then a distant 'African AIDS', by correlating heterosexual danger with Otherness/thereness, performs the final expiatory act for a Western heterosexual masculinity that refuses all containment. (Patton, 'From Nation to Family' 219)

We need to bear in mind Patton's subsequent observation, 'if it is relatively easy, through concepts like stigma, to correlate a range of marginalized others in similarly antipodal positions to the idea of a codifying center ("self" writ large), this does not mean they are in the same *place*, subjected to the same discursive and institutional tyrannies' (Patton, 'Performativity' 179).^[16] However, responses to both the Neal case and the PM's comments strongly suggest that 'Africa' and 'gay community' are both constituted as places 'over there' in the Australian national imaginary—and that both are seen to be places to which HIV/AIDS is 'native' and to which it is 'contained'.^[17]

While the notion of predatory homosexuality has continued to inflect public debates over some social issues in Australia—such as the equalisation of age of consent in NSW in 2004—the emergence of a notion of homosexuals as 'deliberate infectors' is recent in relation to HIV transmission. That role has tended to fall to African men, following a series of high profile cases involving African men and Australian women since the mid-1990s.^[18] These cases typically attracted a high level of media coverage, and almost inevitably follow the discursive trajectory of manipulative aliens deceiving innocent locals. In the year preceding the Neal case, there was high profile media coverage of two cases involving 'African' men and 'Australian' women—that of Stanislas Kanengele (an Australian national of Congolese origin who infected two European nationals in Australia on holiday) and Andre Chad Parenzee (a South-African-born Australian national who had lived in Australia for 20 years). During the period of coverage of the Neal case, Melbourne newspapers also reprised the story of an unnamed Geelong woman who acquired HIV in 2004 during a relationship with Solomon Mwale, a married man of Zambian background, in what appeared to be an attempt to communicate to the 'general public' the impact of behaviours such as Neal's.^[19]

The linkage of HIV, Africa^[20] and immigration has been a persistent feature of Australian media coverage over many years. Articles about Africans and immigration seem almost always to refer to HIV as an inherent feature of people's country of origin in a way that is not evident in accounts of immigration from elsewhere. For example, a 4 April 2007 article on the defection of Congolese swimmers in Melbourne for the Commonwealth games notes that 'as many as 1.1 million have HIV/AIDS'.^[21] A 26 May

2005 feature article in Melbourne's Age newspaper presents the experiences of five members of some of Melbourne's 'smallest ethnic communities'.^[22] A brief 'At a glance' section at the end of each article provides some facts on each interviewee's country of origin. Only in relation to Sam Neves Kitoko, who arrived from the Democratic Republic of Congo in 1984, does this fact box mention the prevalence of HIV/AIDS.^[23] Significantly, Kitoko, in his account, notes the fascination with the exotic which he attracts:

I stood out when I walked along Swanston Street. Women were very, very interested in me. They even used to fight for us. I remember there were five of us Africans in the Lounge and we were acting like celebrities. Having a white girlfriend in Africa is considered an achievement, if you like. White women are much more liberated (than African women) and they're much more broad in their view. It was really different for me, which I really, really liked.

The apparent necessity of providing HIV prevalence figures for a country which Kitoko left before the HIV pandemic emerged reveals the anxieties held about, and fascination with, the perceived hypersexuality of Africans. Patton notes that 'while data from African clinics convinces Westerners that heterosexual transmission is possible, (because all intercourse is the same) this same data is also read as suggesting that widespread transmission among heterosexuals is not likely to require the universal adoption of the condom (because Africans engage in other exotic practices and polygamy)' (Patton, 'From Nation to Family' 223).

The media representations of Michael Neal and the milieu in which transmission took place served to highlight the shared 'otherness' of Africans and homosexuals, by presenting gay communities or sexual networks as exotic places peopled by denizens of unbridled sexuality and depraved practices, analogous to the irresistibly desirable, steamy miasma of African sexuality described by nineteenth-century British colonial writers (Lupton 163-70). But while the media appeared fascinated by the abject figure of Neal, hovering in the liminal space between heterosexual and homosexual, respectable grandfather and drug crazed sexual deviant, the lack of interest in the case shown by their audience suggests that this story, at least, was able to be safely contained within the territory in which it was imagined to reside—namely gay community. It is notable that while the anxiety about the potential for bisexually active men to act as a 'bridge' for infection into the 'wider community' has been as much a feature of Australian media coverage of HIV/AIDS^[24] as it has internationally, this anxiety did not manifest in the case of grandfather Neal, where the traffic across the bridge took the virus back into its imagined home territory of the gay community.

Despotic Perversions

John Ballard has argued that HIV in Australia has been effectively 'contained' within gay communities, to the extent that it has ceased to be an issue for the majority of Australians (Ballard). Ballard notes the conflation of HIV with the 'risk group' of homosexuality in developed countries—accompanied by the intense level of interest in the spectacle of young men dying of rare and exotic diseases—combined with the effect of activism on the part of a stigmatised minority population to engender a more vigorous response to the epidemic than that seen in nations where HIV was able to be configured as 'heterosexual'. He goes on to observe that the Australian response combined, from the very beginning, the traditional public health techniques of surveillance, testing, notification and quarantine with a more radical approach based on the premises of health promotion, soon enshrined in the Ottawa Charter of 1986. The result was a strategy which relied largely on 'government at a distance', in which gay men were constituted as 'citizens capable of bearing a kind of regulated freedom' (Rose and Miller, quoted in Ballard 131) while the 'despotic rationality' of quarantine and containment functioned as a last resort (Mann, cited in Ballard 130).

In the Australian context, this has produced a kind of 'sexual citizenship', wherein community representatives 'had potential legitimacy for redefining responsible citizenship within the community' (Ballard 131). Drawing on Ewald's analysis of mutuality and insurance as a political technology (Ewald), it can be argued that the notion of compliant gay male subjects practicing safe sex has become a lynchpin of not just the epidemiological containment of HIV/AIDS in Australia, but also its psychic containment. The self-regulation of homosexually active men generates political capital for the communities in which they are imagined to reside by providing a space in which risk can be contained without interrupting the business of heterosexual self-expression.^[25] Ballard notes, however, that this way of governing HIV/AIDS has always been subject to tensions around the perception of a 'gay agenda'. He notes that 'the continuity of statistics showing that over 80 percent of Australians with HIV were gay or bisexual men was taken both as evidence that the epidemic had been "contained" and that there had been complicity between governments and gay communities to dilute the image of AIDS and "responsibility" for it' (Ballard 135).

The alleged failure of the Victorian Department of Human Services to contain recent infections by invoking 'despotic rationalities' in the case of Michael Neal, followed by the bringing to light of an ostensibly similar case in South Australia, produced just such a conspiracy theory narrative in some media, in which the 'vested interests' of elites were seen to have valued privacy over the public health.^[26] A particularly striking example

was a piece by Natasha Robinson in *The Weekend Australian* on 21 April entitled 'HIV policies flawed as officials miss bare reality'—striking not only for its blatant attempts to insinuate governmental contamination of a sort remarkably akin to the nation-threatening homosexual conspiracy theories popular in Britain and the USA in the 1960s (Davenport-Hines; Edelman), but also for its sheer confusion. Robinson writes 'the emergence of anti-retroviral drugs [means] the disease is no longer an instant death sentence'—yet within two paragraphs is claiming that 'government lawyers attempted to curtail investigations into men alleged to have spread *the fatal virus*' [27] (my italics). She attributes the apparent secrecy of meetings between gay community leaders and Department of Human Services officials to the Department's alleged terror of 'being perceived as captive to the community sector', likening the situation to NSW, where she claims 'former community workers rule the roost' in the NSW Health Department's HIV policy wing. She elides the fact that, while Victoria's HIV rates are rising, those in NSW are not by referring to national rather than state-based data that reported an increase of 41 percent in HIV notifications.

This theme of unaccountable elites and technocrats colluding to place the community at risk mirrors the loss of trust and general disaffection with government which has emerged over the past 30 years in developed countries (Boivard). It was picked up with glee by conservative media commentators, perhaps most voraciously by Alan Jones in his 2007 interview with Tony Abbott, in which he berated Abbott for failing, as the 'elected servant of the people' to assure him that people with HIV would not be let in under any circumstances.

Hang on. Twenty is twenty too many. Twenty is twenty too many. I mean, already we know that migrants with serious illnesses including leprosy and more than 100,000 with TB have been allowed into this country despite authorities' inability to carry out proper medical supervision. Let 'em loose and contaminate innocent Australians. [28]

Contamination of the Innocents

This set of concerns was also reflected in responses to letters pages and opinion blogs. Objections fell into two main categories. Firstly, there were those who argued that we need to do more to 'look after our own' and that resources should not go to addressing the health issues of citizens of those countries who had clearly failed to meet their own needs, [29] for instance:

Of course the PM should ban people with HIV entering the country. Why should Australia have to foot hefty bills for foreigners for treatment and education. It's ludicrous. Howard is doing the right thing for Australia—well done!

Posted by: Laura of Glebe 11:52pm 1 June 2007

Our government (John Howard and his team) are just trying to protect us—Australians. What is the Labor party trying to do?—Protect foreigners who could compromise our safety... do you want them to govern our country?

Posted by: AM of Parramatta 10:26pm 1 June 2007

At the least the Libs put the country first whereas Labor puts foreigners and special interest groups first

Posted by: Gerry Hammond of Nanny State 3:13pm 1 June 2007

Secondly, others frothed and fumed at the horrible prospect of innocent Australians falling prey to base desires, exotic sexual practices and the diseases of the third world:

First the politicians allow the country to be infected with violent cultures of a religious kind and now they're thinking of bringing in people with incurable disease to one day infect my grandchildren. I'm sick to death of being taxed almost 50 percent of my weekly earnings while governments waste money on these idiotic experiments. Before we allow diseased migrants into the country, why not first find a cure for the uncommon sense disease that politicians seem to contract as soon as they are elected?

Posted by: Bob of Australia 12:37pm 1 June 2007

Similarly, a contribution from 'Peter Aris, West Moonah' to the website of *The Mercury* (Hobart) reads:

REFUGEES from the most AIDS ravaged country in the world are being brought to Australia without any compulsory follow-up medical examinations upon arrival. One of these people was jailed recently in Victoria for deliberately infecting women with AIDS. Australians have every right to expect that refugees/migrants pose no risk to their way of life.

Even the website of Democrats Senator Andrew Bartlett attracted largely negative comments, such as this from 'Geoff' who noted that

Where I used to live we have had African migrants spread HIV outside their community and even to tourists. There is even a myth which is believed by many that having sex with virgins will cure them. I've read and heard lately this belief is widespread, this link seems to back that assertion up...

So CULTURE yet again steps in, what is the answer?

These accounts support Deborah Lupton's assertion that the bodies of black people 'have been portrayed as both potentially defiling and as intensely erotically attractive in their very exotic nature, their cultural position as Other. This would suggest that the boundary between disgust and desire is

very tenuous' (Lupton 169). Remarkably absent from most accounts is any acknowledgement that HIV transmission is readily avoided, as articulated in this comment posted to *The Age's* website by 'Kate Crofts, Southbank':

There is no denying the seriousness of this disease and the potential devastation it could cause within our country. The fact remains though, we are blessed with education and protective devices that will significantly reduce the spread of this disease. Further, with recent medical developments, HIV is treatable.

This latter position can stand as a succinct summation of official policies and approaches to the immigration and management of HIV/AIDS in Australia. The contrast between this position and the panic engendered by the notion of proximity to African(s) with AIDS highlights the consequences of what Patton has identified as 'two principle policy discourses which underwrite very different ideas of the "solution" to disease' (Patton, 'Performativity' 175)—the epidemiological approach, and the tropical medicine model. Patton proposes the tropical disease model is deployed in response to what she sees as the inherent failure of self-Other discourses to address issues of bodies in motion, leading to a situation in which 'the "other" is apparently capable of transcending a boundary without crossing space, without passing outside' (Patton, 'Performativity' 178). She argues that 'when bodies move between or are relocated through discourse, or carry discourses with them into foreign terrains, the work of self-other codes is fractured, transformed or completely disappears'. Thus when 'Africans with AIDS' physically enter Australia, they are transformed from distant spectacle to present menace—a subject position already written for them by an accumulation of media accounts of the alleged behaviour of a few individuals, and poorly prepared psychic defences against the apparently fatal attraction of 'the glossy black of marble or of jet, conveying to the touch sensations more voluptuous than even those of the most resplendent white'[30]. Tropical medicine's post-colonial discourse frames 'disease [as] always proper to place... but only operat[ing] as a disease when it afflicts people from "here"'. Here, immunity is 'equally legible in spatial terms'—a view endorsed by the results of the 2007 Durex condom survey, which reportedly revealed that 'people having unprotected sex live in some of the world's wealthiest nations and exhibit similar behaviours: They lose their virginity early and have more sexual partners, both key predictors of higher rates of unprotected sex' (Fontes and Roach). The same article goes on to note that 'whether you have unprotected sex isn't a matter of being male or female, gay or straight. When it comes to risky bedroom behaviour, what matters most is where you live'. As Patton notes, the tropical model 'asserts that practices and identities are confined to a place'.

In Australia, this mobilisation of a tropical medicine framing of HIV results in a discourse in which the practices of prevention are confined to the space coded as 'gay community'[31] and practices leading to disease

transmission (which include the institutional practices which result in limited care and rapid progression) are confined to Africa and/or places nearer to home such as Papua New Guinea. Thus the discursive immunity conferred by the containment of HIV transmission to gay communities, and of AIDS to the developing world, is deeply threatened by the prospect of the arrival of HIV positive heterosexuals—especially those constructed as compellingly libidinous.

In contrast, the epidemiological approach to disease is performative, requiring a 'vectoral imagination' able to visualise 'the place of the body in the temporal sequence called "epidemic"' (Patton, 'Performativity' 190). The epidemiologic model is concerned less with where bodies and disease are than with what bodies are doing, what identities they are ascribed, and how they are connected to other bodies in a network of actual or possible pathways for disease transmission. Patton notes that this entails a 'perpetual shifting of the panoptic(al) centre, destabilising both the concept of disease and the security of guarding oneself against it'. Or, put more crudely, the epidemiological model requires that heterosexually active Australians take responsibility for their own behaviours, a view more artfully voiced by the Executive Director of the Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations when he expressed concerns that proposed screening of both short and long term visitors conveyed a message that 'people with HIV will be kept out and therefore it's OK to have unsafe sex with people from other countries'.^[32]

Seen through the lens of the tropical medicine model, prevention becomes a matter of containment, rather than the (epidemiological) dispersal of knowledge and the means of prevention. Whilst the knowledge of the means of prevention has been widely and effectively dispersed in Australia, however, the framing of HIV as 'contained' to gay men appears to have resulted in much lower uptake of safe sex behaviours on the part of heterosexuals, compared to gay men (Smith, Rissel, Richters, Grulich and de Visser).^[33] This is in part related to the disavowals available under both the epidemiological model—'I'm not one of those'—or the tropical model—'I don't live/go there' (Patton, 'Performativity' 189). In providing a sense of safety through 'securing a fantasy of "emplacement"', the tropical disease model, allows a 'double disavowal' for heterosexual Australians: 'I live in (white) Australia and *not* in the gay community'. The spectre of HIV positive heterosexual immigrants therefore threatens not only the secure emplacement of white heterosexual Australians in relation to the global pandemic, through the implied threat of bringing the 'third world' home, but also threatens to break down the secure boundaries between 'gay' and 'straight' Australia.

Return of the Repressed

There is one further, central matter which casts light upon the specifically Australian nature of repressions in relation to risk. The modern Australian nation is built upon and around the remnants of an Indigenous culture decimated by the disease and violence which accompanied the arrival of a wave of white immigrants in the late eighteenth century.^[34] Patton notes that the 'colonial homology... [is able to] mask the medical crimes of transporting disease to the colony' (Patton, 'Performativity' 187)—a strategy unmasked by Ari Joseph, who placed this posting on the *Daily Telegraph's* website in response to the later debate about African immigration *per se*:

HOW ABOUT THE WHITE FOLK BRINGING INCURABLE DISEASES TO ABORIGINAL LAND

Posted by: Ari Joseph of 4:08pm 6 October 2007

The continued lack of acknowledgement of this crime, and the ongoing colonial status of relations between Aboriginal and mainstream Australia^[35]—not to mention the repressions and evasions necessary to avoid its recognition—may explain the vigour and vitriol of the comments which eventually came to dominate blog pages and opinion columns once the African immigration story really hit its stride. The particularities of Australia's continued colonisation produce specific anxieties about territory, control of the land and effective border protection.

Julie Marcus has argued that 'in the gendered world of Australian frontier nationalism, the land and its wildness is female and it is through the conquest of this feminized wild that men realize both their masculinity and civilization' (Marcus 18). The resultant civilised nation conforms to the well-established trope of nation-as-woman, in which 'the homeland [is depicted] as a female body whose violation by foreigners requires its citizens and allies to rush to her defence' (Parker, Russo, Sommer and Yaeger 6). The Howard government's term of office was characterised by an intense production of discourses around national sovereignty and control over borders, leading to acts of corporeal mutilation such as the 'excision' of Christmas Island from the territories' immigration zone—an amputation deemed necessary to retain control over the constitution of 'the nation'. In relation to HIV/AIDS, the unprotected protuberance of Cape York, spearing into the underbelly of Western Papua New Guinea, and allowing ready access to residents of PNG's Sepik River province under the Torres Strait Treaty of 1983, was the source of much anxiety.^[36]

Andrew Lattas has demonstrated how Australia's Indigenous people are constituted as part of the land itself, on whose suppression and feminisation the concept of nation has been built (Lattas). However, the confidence that this suppression is complete and holds has been disrupted, for some, by the resurgence of Indigenous culture and populations, and the Wik and Mabo legislation of 1996 and 1993, in which native title was recognised and the

concept of Terra Nullius overturned (Moran 224-6). The consequence of this is a persistent crisis of both national identity and masculinity, underwritten by concerns about legitimacy and the capacity to defend the 'honour of the nation'.

In the Australian national psyche, the sense of a disease and poverty-stricken developing world can never be entirely alien, given, for example, the circumstances of the founding of the Australian nation, repeated descriptions of the living conditions of Aboriginal people as 'third world' and a growing sense of 'border vulnerability' as a definitive theme in national discourse. The apocalyptic visions of depravity and disease evident in the accounts I have considered here can be read as expressions of aversion-displacement that are wrought from the national failure to acknowledge the injustices of colonial history and the present reality of Aboriginal living conditions, as much as they fret about the possibility of the developing world, with all its diseases, coming to call Australia home.

[sta_anchor id="bio"]Alan Brotherton (1963-2015) played a leading role in establishing and shaping community and policy responses to HIV/AIDS in Australia and internationally. He held significant leadership roles in several AIDS organisations including the AIDS Council of New South Wales (ACON), Positive Life NSW, the National Association of People With HIV Australia (NAPWA), the International HIV/AIDS and the International AIDS Society.

Notes

[1] 'Queen praises Australia's compassion and tolerance', *The Mercury* (Hobart) 14 March 2007.

[2] 'My initial reaction is no (they should not be allowed in)', he told Melbourne's Radio 3AW. 'There may be some humanitarian considerations that could temper that in certain cases but prima facie, no'.

[3] See Andrew Bartlett's website for a summary of English language media coverage. <<http://andrewbartlett.com/blog/?p=1426>>.

[4] 'Abbott wary of bar on HIV migrants', *The West Australian* 17 April 2007.

[5] 'Playing Hard Ball—John Howard', *The Times* 15 May 2007.

[6] 'Australia: the politics of fear and neglect', *The Lancet* 369, 21 April 2007, 1320.

[7] Klaus Neumann has noted that, in contrast to efforts during the early 1970s to quietly close the door on non-white immigrants 'the Howard government has publicised policies designed to prevent or discourage asylum seekers from reaching Australia' and 'has prided itself on instituting a punitive regime' in relation to asylum seekers (Neumann). In this context, it may be that many Australians have had enough of blatant appeals to xenophobia. Alternatively, perhaps the impact of Work Choices, which cannot in any way be attributed to the impact of migrants and refugees 'stealing our jobs', blew the successful cover used to that date to distract from the then current government's complicity in processes of globalization which have disadvantaged a significant proportion of the 'battler' electorate the Coalition had successfully wooed away from the Australian Labor Party.

[8] The *Sydney Morning Herald* reader poll at the time recorded around 60 percent in favour of Howard's comments; A national MSN 7 poll recorded support of around 72 percent.

[9] The claims of a culture of 'bug chasing' appear to have been based on one or two comments from complainants that Neal had said he intended to 'breed' HIV positive sexual partners (Julia Medew and Karen Kissane, 'Gay subculture in "bug chase" sees HIV as desirable', *The Age* 21 April 2007); and on one man's account of having been told by a potential partner that the partner wanted to become infected with HIV (Natasha Robinson, 'Accused "set out to spread his HIV"', *The Australian* 21 March 2007). Both men expressed revulsion at such ideas and openly rejected any participation in such a scenario.

[10] The length of time and general lack of response of the Department to repeated reports about Neal's alleged behaviours had exposed the panopticon as unoccupied. Donna Lancaster of Kensington wrote in *The Age* on 6 April 2007:

A scary breakdown in communication

MEMO to Bronwyn Pike: Get all departments to check over their communication networks. In the past few months we have had two incidents, both excuses were 'miscommunication' in the departments. Last time we had escaped sex offenders running round Melbourne, this time an HIV-positive man trying to infect others. What will it be next month? I shudder to think.

[11] 'FACE TO FACE—HIV carrier to front eight men in police line-up', *Sunday Mail* (Adelaide) 20 May 2007; 'HIV sex scandal report cover-up', *The Advertiser* (Adelaide) 7 June 2007.

[12] The level of vitriol of some commentators puts one in mind of Kurt Vonnegut's comment about reviewers 'Any reviewer who expresses rage

and loathing for a novel is preposterous. He or she is like a person who has put on full armor and attacked a hot fudge sundae’.

[13] ‘Hanson fire on diseases’, *Sunday Tasmanian* 22 March 1998.

[14] ‘Please explain—the racism slant’, *Gold Coast Bulletin* 8 October 2007.

[15] By the time the debate had transmogrified into a more overtly racist debate about Africans, public panic appeared to have died down and the majority of comments logged in relation to Immigration Minister Andrews’ comments about African refugees were hostile to the government’s stance (Matthew Ricketson, ‘There’ll be no whistling up another Tampa’, *The Age* 15 October 2007). Howard had more success in appearing to respond firmly to the vested interests which were purported to have failed the country, by responding to Pike’s challenge to review the strategies for management of individuals and instituting a national review of public health procedures in relation to HIV/AIDS. Consistent with the view that processes had been ‘contaminated’, the MacNeil committee was initially established with a level of secrecy, no clear terms of reference nor any involvement of those involved in Australia’s HIV response—until it became clear that the committee was unable to function without any relevant expertise.

[16] In particular, the capacity to mobilise the apparatus of immigration controls against Africans, and the tendency for ‘despotic rationalities’ of control (see references to Ballard later in this essay) to be applied disproportionately to African men relative to their contribution to Australia’s notification rates, need to be taken into account here.

[17] The placement of HIV within ‘gay’ is so firmly established that the small number of heterosexual men with HIV in Australia routinely report responses of disbelief and suspicion on the part of those to whom they disclose, irrespective of that person’s knowledge of their sexual behaviours and identity (Persson, Barton and Richards). The suspicion that a HIV diagnosis casts over the presumed heterosexuality of men with HIV is undoubtedly a significant contributor to the strength of horror and revulsion expressed by heterosexual men (and women) at the prospect of Australia becoming a site of significant heterosexual AIDS transmission.

[18] Which is not to say, unfortunately, that acts of deception and manipulation were not involved in these cases. Nonetheless, the assumption that heterosexuals need not bother with protective behaviours tends to go unquestioned in such accounts, reflected in the shock, astonishment and surprise of commentators that an infection has resulted. On the surge in framing of Western media interest in heterosexual transmission as a matter of monstrous African masculinity see also Newman and Perrson.

[19] Brendan Roberts, ‘Outrage at HIV inaction: Mum queries silence over infected lover’, *Herald Sun* 24 April 2007; Brendan Roberts, ‘Single mum

fighters HIV and poverty as lover faces charges', *Herald Sun* 28 February 2007; 'What police told the court', *Geelong Advertiser* 22 February 2007. One article describes 'Linda's' feelings at seeing Mwale in apparently rude good health, contrasted with her own state of wellbeing—reflecting what Patton ('Performativity') describes as a perception, in the tropical medicine view, that 'natural immunity' is a property of those to whom the disease is proper and endemic (184).

[20] As has been noted in other contexts by Patton ('From Nation to Family'), the vast ethnic, religious and cultural diversity of the African continent tends to be collapsed into one imaginary 'Africa'.

[21] 'Search on as two Congolese swimmers skip flight home', *The Age* 4 April 2007.

[22] Peter Barrett, 'Small World', *The Age* 25 May 2005.

[23] Or indeed of any infectious disease, despite the fact that Mongolia, one of the other countries under discussion, has one of the world's highest per capita rates of HCV.

[24] The majority of cases of deliberate infection which have created headlines in Australia have almost all involved men (of non-Australian, and overwhelmingly African, backgrounds) infecting women. Whilst some of these men have been identified as heterosexual, many of the earlier cases involved bisexually active men. These cases have created an unease associated with the awareness that identity categories and behaviours do not always match up, and have produced a particularly virulent discourse of condemnation in relation to bisexually active men, especially those that are alleged to have infected female partners.

[25] Relative rates of safe sex practice—yet note that it is gay men who are accused of 'complacency'—rather than rational assessment of the likely reduction in risk pursuant to widespread uptake of ART.

[26] See for instance Piers Akerman, 'Deadly game of privacy protection', *Adelaide Advertiser* 12 April 2007 and Jeff Corbett 'All HIV-positive for PM', *Newcastle Herald* 17 April 2007.

[27] The same selectivity about how fatal HIV is was also demonstrated by some members of the national government. In 2003, in reference to the case a HIV positive woman allowed to remain in Australia (on appeal, and only after the outcry produced by the revelation that the woman was a refugee who had acquired HIV as a consequence of being raped in a refugee camp) a spokesperson for then Immigration Minister Phillip Ruddock stated 'Bear in mind HIV is now being treated with a cocktail of drugs that doesn't quite put it into remission but has a series of benefits... These days HIV is not as big a concern as tuberculosis, which is becoming drug resistant and poses a major public health risk' ('AIDS Mum can stay—Rape victim let in to

NT', *Northern Territory News* 7 August 2003). This stands in contrast to Howard's conflation of HIV with TB and other contagious diseases, and his contention that this is a very serious disease.

[28] Transcript of Alan Jones Programme 2GB 31 May 2007.

[29] The responses below are all taken from the Daily Telegraph's blog site. It's interesting to note that no respondents—for or against—mentioned one of the major constraints on African countries' capacity to effectively address HIV/AIDS—the flight of trained medical staff, actively encouraged by Australian (and other developed country) recruitment of developing world health care workers. See Scott, Whelan, Dewdney and Zwi; and Oberoi and Lin.

[30] Thomas Hope, *An Essay on the Origin and Prospects of Man* (1831), quoted in Young (169).

[31] Patton notes later in the essay that gay men 'are self-identical to a space which is already set apart' ('Performativity' 190).

[32] Annabel Stafford, 'HIV positive visitors may be tracked or banned', *The Age* 11 May 2007.

[33] Reported condom use with casual partners was 46 percent among heterosexuals, and 78 percent among gay men.

[34] It is difficult to refrain from the observation that these immigrants not only demonstrated a striking level of cultural incompatibility with the prevailing culture of the Eora nation; but were also deemed to be incompatible with the culture from which they were sent.

[35] Ian Anderson has argued that 'in the context of settler colonial states, such as Australia, colonial structures have never been dismantled. Colonial ways of knowing are not historical artifacts that simply linger in contemporary discourse. They are actively reproduced within contemporary dynamics of colonial power' (Anderson 23-4).

[36] Sean Parnell, 'PNG health minister urges caution on HIV checks', *The Australian* 19 June 2007; 'Hanson warns of disease threat', *The Courier Mail* (Brisbane) 14 June 2007; 'Sick migrants swamp state, says Pauline', *The Cairns Post* 14 June 2007. This anxiety was somewhat 'resolved' in 2011 when Queensland health services, who had been treating people with TB from PNG (people entitled under the 1985 Torres Strait Treaty to travel freely in the 'protected zone' encompassing Australia's Torres Strait Islands and PNG's coastal areas adjacent to the Torres Strait), were directed to stop providing treatment, and Australia instead provided funding and expertise for developing local PNG treatment services (Vincent).

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Introduction: Book Reviewing in Australia

By **Patrick Allington** and **Melinda Harvey**

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This special section on book reviewing in Australia emerges from the symposium *Critical Matters: Book Reviewing Now*, held at the Wheeler Centre^[1] in Melbourne on 9 April 2015 and hosted by Monash University's Centre for the Book. This symposium, the first of its kind ever to take place in Australia, brought together over thirty reviewers, academics, writers, literary editors and publishers to debate a series of 'provocations' on topics such as the necessity of negative reviews, the problem with pitching, the anachronistic nature of critical jargon, the pros and cons of 'clubbiness', and the advent of online reviewing sites. Like the symposium, this special section consciously refuses two premises: namely that, before we even start to talk about book reviewing itself, we have to defend its right to exist or that it is in a state of crisis. Instead, this special section understands book reviewing to be a dynamic field that has influence beyond itself, and that can and should be treated to sustained attention by academics.

The five essays in this special section take three distinct approaches to examine book reviews. Imogen Mathew's 'Reviewing Race in the Digital Literary Sphere: A Case Study of Anita Heiss' *Am I Black Enough for You?*' offers a detailed case study of an important memoir about Indigenous identity that garnered reviews from both 'professional' and 'amateur' reviewers, with legal, political and cultural issues in play. Mathew argues that reviews of Heiss' book, particularly those posted on Amazon, Goodreads and personal blogs, exposed elements of Indigenous-non-Indigenous relations in Australia and became central to a court case focused around Section 18C of the *Racial Discrimination Act*. In using this example—a book, its author and the critical reception, including the negative and politicised responses of some reviewers—Mathew delves deep into the literary, cultural and political ramifications of a transformed book reviewing landscape where non-professional readers post reviews on non-traditional platforms.

Two of the essays—Melinda Harvey and Julieanne Lamond's 'Taking the Measure of Gender Disparity in Australian Book Reviewing as a Field, 1985 and 2013' and Emmett Stinson's 'How Nice is Too Nice? Australian Book Reviews and the "Compliment Sandwich"'—use quantitative analysis to examine book reviewing as a field and as a form, respectively. Harvey and Lamond survey two publications, *Australian Book Review* and *The*

Australian newspaper, across two years, three decades apart, to drill down into the Stella Count's identification of gender disparity in reviewing publications in Australia. Harvey and Lamond find that quantifying changes in scale over this period—for example, in the total number of books being reviewed and the proportion of feature, composite and capsule reviews—offers a more complex picture, and one that ultimately reveals even more pronounced gender disparity than the Stella Count suggests. The study also identifies significant transformations in the way we now 'do' book reviewing in Australia in terms of editorship and publishing, compared with thirty years ago.

Emmett Stinson takes up the question of whether Australian book reviewers are 'too nice', by ascertaining whether book reviews really do tend to comply with the 'compliment sandwich' form—that is, 'four or so paragraphs of positive commentary, then a passing criticism, quickly rescued by affirmation' (Etherington). Stinson applies a mutual appraisal analysis to two recent years of fiction reviewing in *Australian Book Review*. He concludes that there is a culture of 'too nice' reviewing, but goes further, suggesting that the debate over the quality of book reviews acts as a proxy for broader issues, such as the insularity of the Australian literary world.

In contrast to Harvey and Lamond, and Stinson's quantitative investigations, Gillian Dooley's 'True or False? The Role of Ethics in Book Reviewing' and Patrick Allington's 'A Defence of Tempered Praise and Tempered Criticism in Book Reviewing', each take an exegetical approach. Dooley asks if literary criticism can ever be entirely free of ethical judgement. She investigates ethics and reviewing through the prism of her own career as a reviewer and as a book reviews editor, finding at times an interaction between aesthetics and morality 'which is hard to disentangle'. Importantly, Dooley sees the role of the reviewer as 'undertaking a deliberate act of communication with fellow readers'.

Patrick Allington takes a different approach to Stinson to the question of niceness in Australian reviewing, arguing in defence of both tempered praise and tempered criticism. Like Dooley, Allington takes an exegetical approach, examining his own reviewing philosophy—a measured positivity—and offering examples of his reviews. While Allington finds simplistic the dichotomy of 'soft versus snark' he nonetheless engages with this broader debate in mounting a defence of tempered praise.

We suggest that all three of these approaches—the use of quantitative methods, exegetical commentary, and case study-style analyses of particular books' reception—are legitimate ways for the academy to engage with the practice, history and future of book reviewing in Australia, and beyond. As editors, we have not chosen the essays included to look for, or find, common ground – indeed, at times they appear to enter into contest with each other – but rather because, through evidence or reflection, they

intervene constructively in or open up new avenues of discussion about book reviewing in Australia. Implicit in all these essays is a sense that academic literary criticism and book reviewing are not antagonists but partners in literary conversation. If the discussions these essays provoke are uncomfortable and, in turn, contested, then so much the better.

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Reviewing Race in the Digital Literary Sphere: A Case Study of Anita Heiss' *Am I Black Enough for You?*

By **Imogen Mathew**

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1. Introduction

With head turned down and eyes raised in scepticism, Anita Heiss issues an unmistakable challenge from the cover of her 2012 memoir: *Am I Black Enough for You?*. The reader, in turn, is drawn into the ugly cultural and racial politics that characterise life for many Aboriginal Australians. Awarded the 2012 Victorian Premier's Literary Award for Indigenous Writing and nominated for the 2012 Human Rights Award for Literature, Heiss' memoir has its genesis in the 2011 court case *Eatock vs. Bolt*. In a syndicated article entitled 'It's So Hip To Be Black', *Herald Sun* journalist Andrew Bolt accused Heiss, along with several other prominent Aboriginal Australians, of choosing to identify as Aboriginal for financial gain. He was subsequently found guilty of racial discrimination under Section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act (RDA). Justice Bromberg's application of the RDA would push questions about protections from vilification, freedom of speech, journalistic integrity and the alleged 'right to be a bigot' onto the public agenda from 2011 to 2016. [1]

This paper highlights book reviews of *Am I Black Enough?* as a crucial—though hitherto unexplored—juncture in public discussion about the court case. I argue that the book review becomes a key site where the social, political and cultural ramifications of the court case (and the racial politics it brought to the fore) were, and continue to be, debated and contested. While some of these reviews were published in the mainstream media, the highest proportion were recorded on 'digital-native' platforms (Murray 322) by 'popular' or 'lay' readers (Guillory; Procter). My approach is grounded in qualitative analysis, despite the critical reflex to associate this type of enquiry with the quantitative. I engage in a close reading of reviews posted on Amazon, Goodreads and personal blogs, asking what the reviewing practices surrounding *Am I Black Enough?* reveal about contemporary race relations in Australia. My emphasis in this paper is on the reviewing platform, not the reviewer's racial identity. This is a tricky methodological crux: omission of racial identifiers does not necessarily constitute evidence of whiteness; nor can race be neatly divined by evaluative stance. This important question deserves deeper exploration than the present enquiry

allows: my chief concern is to map the transformations book reviewing practices undergo when they appear on non-traditional platforms by non-professional readers.

The first section of this essay explores how reading and reviewing *Am I Black Enough?* enriches the reader's knowledge of Aboriginal Australian culture and people, often leading to an interrogation of attitudes towards, and beliefs about, Aboriginal Australians. I contrast this warm embrace, prominent on blogs and Goodreads, with the hostile reaction found on Amazon, particularly in the days following *Am I Black Enough?*'s publication in 2012. Amazon reviews are stridently negative in their assessment of the book and use the book reviewing platform to pursue what Benwell, Procter and Robinson would call 'not-reading' practices, namely continued debate about Heiss' role in *Eatock vs. Bolt*. As such, I ask if commentary masquerades as reviews on Amazon.

Mainstream media coverage (encompassing traditional print outlets and digital-native news platforms) provides a foil to popular readings of *Am I Black Enough?*. Heiss was interviewed about the memoir by several news outlets (Elliott; Prior) and from 2012 onwards, *Am I Black Enough?* became something of a cultural reference point, invoked regularly in discussion of Aboriginal identity (Cooper; Dangalaba; Johnson; Overington, 'Not So Black and White'; Overington, 'It's Not About Being Black Enough'; Russell-Cook). Traditional book reviews may differ in their attitude towards *Am I Black Enough?*, from the disapproving (Connor) to the appreciative (Bongiorno; Funnell; Maxwell; Stafford) and the moderately ambivalent (McGirr, 'Black', 'Challenging') but they are alike in their shared critical distance from the text. Personal identity is by no means erased, but the reviewer is positioned as a professional, evaluating an object circulating in the literary marketplace. My analysis of popular reviews, however, emphasises the way *Am I Black Enough?* sits in a far more intimate relationship with the reviewer. Indeed, non-traditional reviews are so distinctive because they record intensely personal reactions to the book, ranging from searching self-reflection to angry repudiation. Tantalising parallels, sitting beyond the scope of this essay, could be drawn between the foregrounding of readerly affect in online amateur reviews and that found in female book clubs (Long) and among female readers of popular romance (Radway).

Though the autobiographical project that became *Am I Black Enough?* was commissioned prior to the court case, it was published in April 2012, almost seven months after Justice Bromberg's judgement was released. Apart from a brief statement marking the victory, Heiss had been silent in the intervening months, promoting her latest chick lit novel but refusing to be drawn on *Eatock vs. Bolt*. *Am I Black Enough?* thus represents Heiss' sustained and eloquent response to the court case. Five short chapters recounting Heiss' involvement in the trial structure a narrative that combines family history with political manifesto. Heiss is a prominent figure

in the Australian public sphere and *Am I Black Enough?* exhaustively catalogues her work as an academic, activist and author. She is best known for her commercial women's fiction, 'choc' lit as she playfully calls it, which blends *Bridget Jones*-style humour and *Sex and the City*-style friendships into the lives of glamorous and assertive Aboriginal women.

Common to Heiss' interventions in the public sphere is the belief that

... self-representation in the public domain is not only desired but also essential for self-respect and dignity in Australian society today. Definitions of Aboriginality from outside the community—sometimes through media commentary—continue to provide the motivation for many authors to pen responses and reactions. ('Blackwords' n.p.)

Am I Black Enough? works to reframe public debate about the court case after the initial wave of press coverage, addressing the question of who gets to define Aboriginal identity and on what terms. If Bolt's articles attempt to hold Aboriginal people to a narrow and outdated logic, premised on the idea that skin colour determines identity, Heiss' act of self-representation emphatically reclaims that territory. Moreover, the digital literary sphere opens up a space for the (not-)reading public to engage with diverging accounts of identity. From a scholarly perspective, these reviews provide an insight into how racial difference is negotiated and the machinations of online book reviewing across multiple platforms.

In setting forth this investigation, I affirm *Am I Black Enough?* as a subject worthy of academic enquiry. This paper presents the first sustained consideration of a memoir (and its reception) whose importance has been hinted at but never directly addressed. It is telling that academic book reviews remain the most fulsome site of scholarly engagement with *Am I Black Enough?* (Milatovic; Quick). When Heiss' memoir does surface in scholarly writing, it is as a single instance: a footnote, a sentence, a paragraph at most (Anthony 19; Birns 118-9; Carey and Prince 277; Gelber and McNamara 473-4; Mathew, 'Pretty' 9; 'Educating'; Schwartzman 206; Whitlock 197). The memoir and its reception are notably absent from accounts of the social, legal and media repercussions of *Eatock vs. Bolt* (Aggarwal; Griffiths; Maddison; Stone). Additionally, this paper responds to Simone Murray's call for greater engagement with the digital literary sphere (echoed by Daniel Allington and Stephen Pihlaja in 'Reading in the Age of the Internet', a 2016 special issue of *Language and Literature*). Several of the websites and social phenomena comprising the digital literary sphere have been analysed on a case-by-case basis, including Goodreads (Nakamura), e-readers (Barnett; Cameron; Rowberry), Amazon (Allington; Finn; Steiner, 'Private Criticism'), LibraryThing (Pinder), blogs (Steiner, 'Personal Readings'; Nelson) and online reading challenges (Foasberg). By following *Am I Black Enough?* as it is reviewed across the digital literary sphere, this paper emphasises the analytic insights to be

gained from using a single text to draw comparison between reviewing platforms.

2. Education, Empathy and Ethical Reflection

For the segment of Heiss' reading public found on Goodreads or blogs, reviewing *Am I Black Enough?* is a tripartite exercise in empathy, education and ethical reflection. These reviewers typically isolate and identify the educational aspects to Heiss' memoir before demonstrating what they have learned through extended ethical reflection. This approach eschews the professional reviewer's assumed objectivity in favour of a more personal relationship with the text. While these reviews lack the imprimatur of an established media masthead, there are compelling reasons to consider Goodreads and blog reviews as reviews. Heiss' memoir remains subject to critique and evaluation. The criteria (Accessible? Enjoyable? Enriching?) may vary from those applied by professional reviewers, but this should not exclude Goodreads and blog reviews from the category of book reviews. Rather, it demonstrates the new and often unexpected characteristics book reviews acquire when they are published in the digital literary sphere by non-professional readers.

Studies of cross-cultural and cross-racial reception have consistently shown that reading and talking about books is a site of self-reflexivity and knowledge production. This subset of reception studies concerns the (homogenously white or racially mixed) reception of non-white authored texts in a variety of geographic locations: New Zealand (Keown), America (Davis, 'White Book Clubs', 'Oprah's Book Club'; Burwell) the United Kingdom (Lang, "'Enthralling'", 'Reading'; Procter) and beyond (Procter and Benwell). Yet the reception of Aboriginal-authored texts by Australian readers has received scant attention. Extant research is either set against a European backdrop (Haag, 'Bumping', 'Indigenous'; Čerče; Di Blasio) or investigates the reception of white Australian-authored texts (Clarke and Nolan 'Reading Groups', 'Book Clubs'). To inaugurate a cross-cultural reception studies framework in an Australian context, this paper marks out the importance of studying reader responses to Aboriginal-Australian authored-texts.

Examining reading practices in white book clubs ('White') and on television ('Oprah's'), Kimberley Chabot Davis counters the prevailing view of cross-racial empathy as inherently colonising and hegemonic. According to her, white reception of African-American-authored texts demonstrates that 'empathetic identifications' can be an effective method of 'galvanizing anti-racist political sensibilities' ('White' 157). In the UK, Anouk Lang explores the 'transformative potential' of cross-cultural reception ("'Enthralling'" 137) among readers of Andrea Levy's *Small Island*. She finds that preconceived

notions of British colonialism are often 'relativized and destabilized' (129): '[readers are prompted] to interrogate their own perceptions, however briefly' (130). Davis, like Lang, reports that some 'white female [Oprah] fans ... experienced transformative identifications with black subjects and a reflective alienation from white privilege' ('Oprah's' 399). Davis and Lang hint at, but never fully express, the educative possibility of cross-cultural reception. This section makes that possibility explicit.

Pedagogy, education and race are encoded within the narrative of Heiss' memoir. At primary school, she is appraised as "'[...] a good counter for an 'abo'" (85). High school is a mercifully 'racist-free safety zone' (90-1); as an undergraduate, the discovery that 'the government considered animals more valuable than [her] mum' provides the impetus for her Honours thesis on the 1967 Referendum (100-1). Her time as a doctoral candidate in Media and Communications (106-14) marks the transition from *educated* to *educator*. She is subsequently 'appointed deputy director of the Warawara Department of Indigenous Studies at [Macquarie University]' (114) and declares 'I don't think *any* Australian student should be graduating from *any* Australian tertiary institution without having done at least one unit on Indigenous Australia' (118; original italics). This extends to primary and secondary schools: 'many Australian students at the age of fifteen still don't know the basics about Aboriginal society or culture' (196). Thus, when Heiss conducts 'what should be a standard author visit', it 'ends up becoming a crash-course in cultural awareness workshop' (197). Heiss also devotes a chapter to explaining the pedagogical subtext to her 'choc' lit (211-25). Education, in other words, forms a recurring theme in *Am I Black Enough?* and is refracted in multiple directions through the prism of Heiss' life. Moreover, the memoir—as a text circulating in the public sphere—aims to educate others about the diversity of Aboriginal identity in twenty-first-century Australia.

Am I Black Enough?'s 2014 entry into the American marketplace was shepherded by the University of Hawai'i Press, a publishing house that 'strives to advance knowledge through the dissemination of scholarship' ('About'). Here, the editorial philosophy and institutional affiliations underpinning *Am I Black Enough?*'s trans-Pacific debut reinforce its pedagogical overlay.^[2] In Australia, Michelle Carey and Michael Prince applaud the memoir as an ideal learning tool for Murdoch University's Australian Indigenous studies major:

... students are asked to write a review of Anita Heiss' 2012 book *Am I black enough for you?* [sic] This exercise teaches students the critical skills required to undertake a book review, while introducing them to an emerging genre in Indigenous literature, namely 'Choc Lit'—and how it might be juxtaposed against related genres such as 'Chick Lit' and 'Sistah Lit' (Guerrero, 2006). It also engages them in recent debates about Indigenous diversity and freedom of speech (Aggarwal, 2012). (277)

The ease with which Heiss' memoir integrates into the classroom highlights its relevance as an educational aid and the fact that student engagement is evaluated through the genre of the book review is similarly remarkable, suggesting that the act of reviewing magnifies and solidifies insights gained through reading.

The use to which Carey and Prince put *Am I Black Enough?* is not unusual. Many reviewers on blogs and Goodreads comment on the memoir's value as an educational resource, primed for use in the secondary or tertiary classroom. [3] Rosamond, in her blog review, hopes that '[Heiss'] book is seen on secondary school reading lists in the near future'. Chris Gordon, writing for the independent bookseller *Readings*, similarly confirms that 'every high school in Australia should be ensuring this book is on its curriculum'. Goodreads reviewers are even more expansive in their comments on *Am I Black Enough?*'s suitability as a teaching aid, with many stating that they plan to use it in their classroom or that they are already: Pam, a 'soon to be high school teacher', felt that *Am I Black Enough?* contained 'some great "teachable moments"'. For Beverley, not only should *Am I Black Enough?* be 'required reading' but 'it certainly will be, at least parts of it, for [her] own students'. Becca doesn't identify as a teacher, she is keen to see *Am I Black Enough?* 'in the Secondary Schools books Curriculum' [capitals in original]. Evidence of its suitability lies close to home: 'I have two teenage boys and I already have one of them reading this book'.

Goodreads users were also the most likely to comment on the educational aspects (and the pedagogical experience) of reading *Am I Black Enough?*. 'Read this. Learn from it'; 'very educational, entertaining and well worth the read'; 'brilliant, educational and challenging'; 'a genuinely fascinating book, from which I learnt a lot'; 'an entertaining read that informs, challenges and, hopefully, opens the reader up to a new way of viewing Aboriginal Australia'; 'a relatable tone that is both appealing and educating'. Others praise the memoir through an enumeration of what they learnt: 'the main lesson I learnt from Anita was...'; 'the book taught me more than I had previously known'; 'I learnt a lot, which is the very reason the author wrote it in the first place—to teach, to share knowledge'. [4] Ethical reflection is likewise present: 'a thought provoking and often light hearted read'; 'a wonderful text that provokes much thought, challenges prejudices through her words and experiences'; 'forces self reflexivity of the best kind'; '... an easy yet thought provoking read'; 'thoughtful, engaging and humorous this book gives me a perspective I had not contemplated before'. While an emphasis on the thought-provoking aspects of *Am I Black Enough?* account for the majority of ethically reflective responses on Goodreads, some reviewers offer a more personal take. Fay, for one, admits 'I can never work [sic] a mile in the author's shoes, but I have a much greater appreciation of how those shoes feel now'. Caitlin testifies to having been 'moved [by the

book] in a place so deep [she has] yet to find the words to describe it'. In these examples, ethical reflection may be prompted by *Am I Black Enough?* but the interior work of such reflection takes place off-stage, outside the book review.

A number of readers are, however, willing to use the book reviewing space to submit to uncomfortable and potentially unflattering moral examination. This often manifests in a dawning awareness of the reviewer's *white* racial identity. Take Susan Righi's Goodreads review: 'heck, I'd gotten sick enough of the racism of my upbringing & the privilege of my (white) life'; '[Heiss] also managed to correct some common (mostly white) misconceptions & offer the beginnings of an education'; 'Heiss made me think it was possible to say that I am white & often quite ignorant—but I'm willing to learn'. Here, education and ethical reflection are laminated together: learning does not happen separately to ethical reflection but they are one and the same thing. Secondly, if the political project underpinning Heiss' literary output coheres with the objective of critical whiteness studies (to 'make [whiteness] visible' (Moreton-Robinson 87)) Righi's repeated references to herself as a white woman suggests that Heiss has done more than simply *educate* people about the diversity of Aboriginal Australian experience: Heiss demonstrates, with withering clarity, that *white* Australians cannot be exempted from racial politics. They sit at its deeply entangled heart.

A similar operation is at play in blog reviews by Jeffrey Winton and Linette Webster. In both cases, reading and then reviewing *Am I Black Enough?* acts as the impetus for re-visiting behaviour and beliefs about Aboriginal people. Some parts of Winton's review praise the educative elements of Heiss' memoir ('[she] is right on the money about how little we are taught about the history or even presence of Aboriginals in Australia'; 'I want to keep learning. Anita Heiss has just stimulated that desire even more. And there is plenty to learn.'). Other parts credit it as an effective framework for re-evaluating the past:

In reading Anita's book, I found myself feeling embarrassed, even perhaps a little guilty at times. I was never a deliberate racist, a white supremacist piece of garbage, but in reviewing those times as a lot younger and possibly (probably?) stupider, I realise just how I viewed Aboriginals as different and not necessarily in a positive way.

This sensitive and frank disclosure of the reader's lack of knowledge about Aboriginal Australians is echoed by Linette Webster. She begins her review by painting the racial climate of her childhood: '... I was blessed with a few teachers who taught me to respect the ways of the original inhabitants of this wide brown land, but at the same time, Aboriginal jokes were still told ... names such as abo, coon and boong were also in use'. The present, in contrast, has brought partial improvement: '... abo jokes might be relatively

easy to stamp out, [but] it is the inadvertent and inherent racism that is much harder to get rid of. The racism that is paved with good intentions.' She then goes on to list some of her own well-intentioned thoughts that could be construed as racist. In all three examples, reviewers welcome the experience of being educated, and the act of reviewing the book is inextricably linked with the act of reviewing the self.

Just as 'theatrical norms of [authorial] performance and conscious self-fashioning increasingly infiltrate the literary sphere' (Murray 328), so too are online book reviews a carefully mediated and cultivated public performance. It seems unproblematic to designate online reviewing, particularly on blogs and Goodreads, as a foundry for the creation of a well-read, considerate and critical literary persona. However, when the memoir under review wears its racial politics on its sleeve as overtly as *Am I Black Enough?*, the performative nature of the review is correspondingly amplified. If, on Amazon, this takes the form of trolling and hyperbolic grandstanding, Goodreads and blog reviewers overwhelmingly present themselves as liberal-minded, sensitive and politically-engaged citizens, eager to learn about Aboriginal people, culture and history. While I have no qualms interpreting these reviews as genuine expressions of learning and ethical reflection, they nonetheless remain performed acts for an imagined, public audience.

The correlation between thematic emphasis on 'education' in Heiss' memoir, amateur reviewing practices, and Goodreads/blog reviews goes deeper still. *Am I Black Enough?* is not only *about* education, but the *act* of reading it, as previous surveys of cross-cultural reception have shown, can be transformative, destabilising, and most importantly, educative. (For an explanation of how this didactic impulse drives Heiss' fiction, see Mathew, 'Educating'). Viewed from the perspective of online amateur reviewing practices, the ability to identify and reproduce pedagogical aspects of *Am I Black Enough?* becomes a way for non-professional readers to demonstrate their reviewing competency and critical literacy. Genre plays a role here too. The desire to be educated—and reader's concomitant gratitude for Heiss' guidance—sits in stark contrast to the reception of Heiss' 'choc' lit. Readers of *Tiddas* (2014) constitute roughly the same demographic as readers of her memoir and populate the same reviewing spaces. They are markedly less enthused, however, at the prospect of being educated while reading a genre premised on escapist fun. This suggests that the non-fiction genre of the memoir is more likely to be read—and accepted—as an educational text. Or, given that most works by Heiss have a pedagogical overlay, this is likely to be received more positively in her non-fiction than her fiction.

3. Amazon Reviewing Controversy

The desire to educate others forms a frequent refrain in *Am I Black Enough?*: 'I want people to be challenged, to think about their role in the world and how their behaviour impacts on other people, particularly Aboriginal people. I want readers to learn ...' (199). From the evidence presented above, Heiss appears to have been successful. Yet this tells only half the story. At the time of its publication, Heiss' memoir was reviewed extensively on Amazon; these reviews are remarkable for their insistent negativity and their obdurate focus on the court case and Heiss at the expense of reviewing the book itself. Moreover, they occupy the porous boundary between reviewing and commentary; in these reviews, 'not reading' practices and 'non-readers' (Benwell, Procter and Robinson) play a crucial role in generating controversy.

Amazon reviews have been the focus of both mainstream and scholarly analysis. The former frequently parses its coverage using the language of scandal and controversy—and not without reason. The historian Orlando Figes and crime writer R.J. Ellory have both admitted to 'sock puppetry', the practice of using reviews to pseudonymously praise their own writing while panning the work of rivals. Amazon has pursued legal action against web users who offer to review books for a fee and the case study offered by this paper precedes more recent accounts of 'activist' reviews, whereby proponents of a particular cause (such as those who believe that the 2012 Sandy Hook massacre was staged by the American government) use the Amazon book reviewing space to discredit or attack their opponents, invariably flooding the book in question with negative, one-star reviews. The mainstream media generally portray book reviewing practices on Amazon as one limb of a multi-tentacled, ethically dubious empire: Amazon is equally notorious for its tax evasion, anti-competitive practices and poor treatment of workers. Scholarly accounts, by contrast, are chiefly interested in Amazon as a source of data. This research appears in computer science or business journals and employs a variety of statistical and algorithm-based methodologies to evaluate the utility of reviews, ratings and recommendations. In contrast, this paper contributes to the small body of work that treats Amazon reviews as a qualitative source of analysis for literary studies. Through reference to earlier scholarly treatments of scandals of reception (namely Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* and Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*) this paper takes the mainstream media's focus on Amazon book reviewing scandals as a matter of academic concern.

The Amazon reviewing controversy surrounding Heiss' memoir has its origins, much like the court case itself, in the work of Andrew Bolt. Hot on the heels of *Am I Black Enough?*'s release in early April 2012, Bolt published a blog post asking 'Are We Censored Enough for You?'. The text of this particular post has disappeared from the web, but remaining fragments available on *Crikey* or Bolt's Goodreads blog, coupled with media reportage at the time, suggest that its most salient feature was a link to the Amazon

website for *Am I Black Enough?*, accompanied by the disclaimer 'I am not trying to incite anyone into attacking Heiss's book' (Bolt qtd. in Sear). Bolt was responding to the closure of the comments section on several Australian-hosted *Am I Black Enough?* webpages after they had received heavy trolling traffic. That *Am I Black Enough?* could still be reviewed on the American Amazon website was designed to demonstrate the limits of 'free speech' in Australia and the comparatively greater civil liberties enjoyed across the Pacific. A few days after Bolt's blog post went live, Saffron Howden, a Fairfax journalist, wrote a pair of articles questioning Bolt's response ('Racist', 'Bolt'). Her work was later subject to a complaint to the Australian Press Council. Bearing this snarled history in mind, I focus on Amazon reviews published on the main US website; the local Australian shopfront opened for business in late 2013, when the lion's share of *Am I Black Enough?* reviews had already been recorded on the American website. Although *Am I Black Enough?* continues to be reviewed on Amazon (.com and .com.au) my analysis centres on reviews from early April 2012.

To borrow Bethan Benwell, James Procter and Gemma Robinson's terminology, the reviewing practices that comprise *Am I Black Enough?* Amazon reviews could productively be viewed through the framework of 'non-readers' and 'not-reading'. Not only do 'non-readers' (as opposed to the more far more commonly encountered category of 'readers') represent an under-theorised but highly necessary area of reception studies, [5] but also they tend to emerge in controversies that, perhaps not incidentally, implicate contested religious, racial or ethnic identities. Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* (1988) represents the high-watermark in this regard, followed more recently by the furore that erupted on the publication of Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2003) and its adaptation into film. I formulate my investigation into the *Am I Black Enough?* Amazon reviews using the terms provided by Benwell, Procter and Robinson, that 'the values attached to reading, not reading, and the choices between them [are] variously attached to notions of freedom, tolerance and democracy...' (84). Moreover, like Benwell, Procter and Robinson, I treat 'not reading' as a 'fertile and contested site of meaning production that still has much to teach us about the significance of recent book controversies' (84).

As I have shown in the preceding section, book reviews posted on personal blogs and Goodreads tend to produce certain types of discourse about race, where reading about race becomes a site of learning and ethical reflection. While race still forms the basis of the majority of *Am I Black Enough?* Amazon reviews, it is parsed in language filled with derision, scorn and outrage. These reviews hold Heiss up as a 'hypocrite', 'a grotesque hypocrite' and a 'coward'. She asks '... a bold, rhetorical question, smug in her knowledge that the last person to answer it publicly was persecuted by law' and embodies 'Aboriginal tokenism by a token aboriginal [sic] living off the public teat'. Her Aboriginal heritage is so small as to be negligible: Heiss

is '[a member] of the professional aboriginal [sic] class', 'predominantly of European descent' and 'obviously white'. Reviewers lament their inability to express their opinions on an Australian website ('I am using this forum as it would be illegal for me to express these views in Australia, such is the curtailment of freedom of speech'; 'I believe freedom of speech still exists in the US; it no longer does in Australia'). The only possible reason anyone may want to purchase Heiss' memoir is to use it as toilet paper ('This balderdash as a paperback has one use. Take it with you on a [sic] Everest climb and use it page by page each whenever the need calls'). Or not: 'I wouldnt [sic] even buy this book to wipe my ??? [sic]'.

The fact that so many of these reviews are written by non-readers who use the Amazon reviewing space to parade their not-reading practices presents an important question: are the *Am I Black Enough?* Amazon reviews actually reviews at all? The answer, as I will show, is both a yes and a no. On one hand, they bear far greater resemblance to commentary than to any traditional conception of a review. This can be indexed in several ways. First, they mirror the online comments section still available in other fora, such as Andrew Bartlett's blog review of *Am I Black Enough?* and an interview with Heiss on the ABC's Radio National. Second, most of the Amazon reviewers have not read *Am I Black Enough?*: while this is implicit in most of the reviews, some staunchly assert their 'not-reading' ('I have not read this book and have no intention of doing so'; 'As a clear caveat up front, please note that I have not read this book, nor do I intend to'; 'i [sic] will not even bother reading the book (and I state that now without any pretence) so i am unable to critique its contents as a body of work'; 'I read the first few pages for free (thanks Amazon) – what a load of self serving [sic] dribble'). Third, most of the reviewers pursue a line of enquiry that has little to do with the book itself, and more to do with Heiss as public figure ('a professional grievance monger'; 'yet another race huckster'), a perceived silencing of civil liberties ('In Australia we don't have the freedom of speech that enables us to answer [her] question') and the waste of taxpayer's money ('using the mis deeds [sic] of the past to feather your own nest in the present on the taxpayers dime is a disgrace').

When Amazon reviewers do discuss the book, this is generally limited to a disputation of the titular question before digressing quickly back to the court case. Those who have read *Am I Black Enough?* are scathing: '[a]fter having read this book, I am surprised it was ever published. In a triumph of the middling with a nod to mediocrity, the book is dull and uninspiring, no great literary work and leaning heavily on the victimhood angle'; 'As for a work of literary merit, I'd place it up there with "Mein Kampf" and "The Little Red Book"'. Fourth, a number of reviewers echo Bolt's frustration at the closure of the *Am I Black Enough?* comments section on several Australian websites. The Amazon reviewing space represents a refuge for those whose desire to continue discussion of the memoir has been curtailed

on Australian-hosted websites. In this light, Amazon reviews are perhaps more appropriately characterised as transposed commentary. Finally, the comments section under each Amazon review provides additional space for vigorous interaction with the preceding review. The number of comments sitting under one review can be astronomically high, with some (mostly the few positive *Am I Black Enough?* reviews) registering between 80 and 100 comments. In this sense too, *Am I Black Enough?* Amazon reviews more closely approximate bitter and protracted online flame wars than book reviews.

For all the reasons I incline to read Amazon reviews as comments, there remain some sticking points. An argument could be made, for example, that the Amazon reviews *are* reviews because they appear under a particular rubric designated as a reviewing space. Even if a close reading of the content would suggest otherwise, the fact that they are presented and labelled as reviews deserves credence in a discussion of their relationship to the reviewing genre. Further acknowledgement of the sway 'review' holds as a label or generic marker is demonstrated by my choice in this paper to refer to the Amazon reviews as reviews, in spite of the concerns I raise in the preceding paragraphs. Finally, if a book review is designed to help readers decide whether a particular book merits their investment of time and money, there should be no doubt that Amazon reviews fulfil this purpose too. Reviewers respect the conventions of the review by giving *Am I Black Enough?* a starred rating (usually one out of five) and they are adamant that this book should not be bought: 'Don't waste your money...'; 'Do not get it'; 'I recommend you DON'T buy this book' [capitals in original]; 'Spend you [sic] money elsewhere on an author more deserving'.

Unlike reviews appearing on other platforms, the *Am I Black Enough?* Amazon reviews cannot be discussed without addressing the charge of racism: were they racist or simply tough and unsparing? For critics of Andrew Bolt, sympathetic to Heiss' writing and her role in the court case, the Amazon reviews are 'predictably nasty' (Bongiorno); these commentators respect Heiss' 'courage' in the face 'hate mail and racist comments' (Windisch), rue their own 'misfortune' at having witnessed the 'racist and derogatory comments' to which Heiss was subject (Foster) and stand in solidarity with her 'after another internet backlash from trolls' (Prior). On the other hand, those supportive of Bolt and disappointed with the outcome of the court case reject any charge of racism. This is a no-brainer for Andrew Bolt: '... none of the reviews I'd seen when I linked [to Amazon] were racist by any sane definition' ('Race' n.p.). Caroline Overington concedes that the reviews 'bristle... with criticism of Heiss' decision to publish her book, some of it moderate, some of it quite cruel' but avoids any discussion of racism ('It's Not About Being Black Enough' n.p.).

The racial politics at work in the *Am I Black Enough?* Amazon reviews cannot be ignored, nor dismissed as simply harsh critique. They rest on the same logic voiced by Bolt in his original newspaper articles, that Heiss' claims to Aboriginal identity are spurious and that her identification as an Aboriginal woman is motivated by financial gain. Heiss is everything Aboriginal people are assumed not to be: fairer-skinned, articulate, financially secure and professionally successful. The public discussion of racial politics on Amazon anticipates the more recent boozing that has dogged Sydney Swans footballer Adam Goodes. [6] Waleed Aly's succinct and devastating summary ('the minute an Indigenous man stands up and is something other than compliant, the backlash is huge... We boo our discomfort') [7] provides a disturbingly apt framework for reading Amazon reviews of *Am I Black Enough?* as an index of our discomfort when an Aboriginal woman refuses to be complicit in stereotypes perpetuated by people such as Bolt. Of course, many who read and reviewed *Am I Black Enough?* treated this process as an opportunity to learn about Australia's First Peoples and reflect on their own attitudes towards Aboriginal Australians. At the risk of giving too much weight to those who shout the loudest, the Amazon reviews measure just how deeply contested racial politics and Aboriginal identity remain in contemporary Australian society.

4. Conclusion

The reception of Anita Heiss' *Am I Black Enough for You?* should leave no doubt that racial politics hold tremendous sway over online reviewing practices. If, in some corners of the digital literary sphere, reviewing race is a process of learning and reflection, in others it is a space scorched with anger and indignation. When this terrain is appropriated *en masse* to denounce a book, its author, and the events preceding its publication, the line between commentary and reviews is confusingly blurred. Despite the many differences between the two types of reviews discussed in this paper, what is perhaps most remarkable are the points on which they converge. As Benwell, Procter and Robinson point out, 'reading' and 'not reading' alike are profoundly fertile sites of meaning-making that start with the book but often end up in another place altogether. This paper has shown that the book review, as a genre and as a site of online literary engagement, opens up vistas that far exceed the book itself, travelling inwards towards the self or opening outwards towards the Australian psyche and its constituent parts.

Am I Black Enough for You?, is, admittedly, an extreme example. It sits at the confluence of a unique and unprecedented set of events in Australian literary, legal and political history. It implicates an extraordinary range of actors, from the private reader to the Prime Minister. Its reception brings to

light the entangled racial politics of the nation as a whole, encompassing deep reservoirs of goodwill and animosity. Yet the very things that make Heiss' memoir attractive as a case study of racial politics in the digital literary sphere and beyond also mark out its limitations. Its sensational beginnings in Andrew Bolt's articles and subsequent court case, its provocative title and controversies of its reception all give weight to the question of how representative a case study it truly is, and how applicable any findings extracted from it may be. Such doubts are legitimate but misleading. They ignore the influence one book can have in provoking and rekindling a debate about freedom of speech, protection from vilification and an individual's right to identify with their cultural, racial or ethnic origins.

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Notes

[1] The initial focus on Aboriginal Australians widened to include many marginalised community groups. The January 2015 *Charlie Hebdo* shootings in Paris, alongside the Abbott government's ultimately unsuccessful bid to repeal the 'Andrew Bolt Law', have kept debate about the RDA alive for several years.

[2] This is further reinforced by the University of Hawai'i Press' focus on postcolonial and autobiographical writing.

[3] All Goodreads, Amazon and blog reviewers have been given pseudonyms but the names of reviewers from mainstream media outlets

and online magazines have been retained. Bibliographic details for the latter group can be found in the Works Cited.

[4] Future research could explore this in relation to long-running debates about the educative value of literature and literary studies more broadly.

[5] For a tongue-in-cheek take on not-reading practices, see Pierre Bayard's *How To Talk About Books You Haven't Read*.

[6] Goodes is an Aboriginal man who has denounced racism on and off the sporting field. When he was booed by opposition spectators at Australian Football League matches in 2015, it was justly interpreted by many as racist.

[7] I thank Monique Rooney for bringing Aly's commentary to my attention.

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Taking the Measure of Gender Disparity in Australian Book Reviewing as a Field, 1985 and 2013

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This essay presents and analyses the initial results of a large-scale and comparative quantitative survey of book reviews to draw some conclusions about the current state of Australian book reviewing as a field. We argue that the gender disparity in Australian book reviewing that has been identified by the Stella Count over the past four years needs to be seen in the wider context of changes to the nature and extent of book reviews over time. We compare two key publications across two years, three decades apart: *Australian Book Review (ABR)* and *The Australian* in 1985 and 2013.

This study is motivated by an interest in the interrelationship between forms of writing about literature that take place within and beyond the academy. Book reviewing is an understudied sector of the literary field, despite the fact that it has an influence on authors' careers, book sales and publishers' commissions as well as on the determinations of literary value that underlie the discipline of Literary Studies. In this paper, we use 'literary journalism' to broadly describe writing about literature published in non-academic outlets in the print and online media, of which book reviews are a subset. We use 'academic literary criticism' to describe writing about literature which is published in scholarly journals and monographs.

Our study finds a situation in which the allocation of space within the books pages of *The Australian* and *ABR* is shifting: the number of books being reviewed has dramatically decreased across both publications, and the proportion of feature reviews has substantially increased. We find that the ubiquitous red-and-blue pie charts produced by feminist literary organisations Stella and VIDA, with their focus on percentage and not scale, underestimate the implications of the gender bias they identify. When we compare *The Australian* and *ABR* in 1985 to 2013 we can see that changes in the size and shape of the book reviewing field, as well as to review type and length, have compounded the disparity identified by repeated attempts to quantify it.

I. Background to our study

Discussion about book reviewing in Australia—as elsewhere—has usually taken place outside the academy. There is only one academic monograph on book reviewing: Gail Pool's *Faint Praise: The Plight of Book Reviewing in America* (2007). Prior to that, scholars were critic-focused and did not survey book reviewing as a form or a field: for example, George Watson's *The Literary Critics: A Study in Descriptive Criticism* (1962) and, more recently, James Ley's *The Critic in the Modern World* (2014). This does not accurately reflect the centrality of book reviews to academic literary criticism. Book reviews are often the first port of call for researchers keen to ascertain the reception of a particular book or the socio-historical context in which it was produced. Indeed, academics working in Literary Studies blithely quote from book reviews as evidence but rarely acknowledge or question what Simon During would call their 'institutionality' or even their historicity—that is, the set of institutions within which book reviews are produced, and the historical, social, economic and geographical contexts of the periodicals in which they are published (During 317; Dale and Thomson 124).

In the Australian context, there is a significant body of research into nineteenth-century literary journalism, which has tended to use book reviews to trace the development of a national literature (Dale and Thomson 120). In addition, there have been two studies looking explicitly at book reviewing in Australia: in 1930 (Dale and Thomson) and five years, a decade apart, from 1948 to 1978 (McLaren). This has not been matched by a similar interest in the book review's relation to contemporary literature. There have been several missed opportunities: only brief mention is made in Peter Pierce's and Elizabeth Webby's important books surveying Australian literature published by Cambridge University Press; Craig Munro and Robyn Sheahan-Bright's *Paper Empires: A History of the Book in Australia, 1946-2005* has chapters on festivals and writers' centres but not book reviewing. Exceptions to this are Katherine Bode's *Reading by Numbers* and 'Methods and Canons: An Interdisciplinary Excursion', in which she examines newspaper mentions of Australian writers as recorded in the Austlit database in the context of academic discussions of these writers, publication statistics and the gendering of the literary field. However, her data does not distinguish between reviews and other forms of literary journalism, and only includes a fraction of the book reviewing taking place in Australia in this period. Austlit's indexing of newspaper reviews of Australian writers is far from comprehensive, and largely excludes two very prominent components of the book pages in Australia: reviews of nonfiction books and works by overseas authors. These aspects need to be examined in order to understand the field of book reviewing. There has also been some interest in book reviewing outside of the field of Literary Studies, notably from media scholars Sybil Nolan and Matthew Ricketson's 'Parallel Fates: Structural Challenges in Newspaper Publishing and their

Consequences for the Book Industry', which examines copy-sharing in the Fairfax newspapers.

There are a number of reasons for the academic neglect of the field of contemporary book reviewing: these include the scale and diversity of book reviews; the precariousness of outlets and their contents; as well as the embeddedness of book reviews in the economics of publishing and the print media. Literary Studies' ongoing project to legitimate itself as a discipline systematic or 'scientific' enough to belong inside the university has also played a part. In his book *Professing Literature*, Gerald Graff has argued that scholars actively and consciously 'wanted to purge' Literary Studies of 'sentimentality and amateurism' (121-2); literary journalism has provided it with a convenient foil. Academic criticism has, at various times, rejected approaches frequently seen in book reviewing: biographical criticism; jargon-free language; affective criticism; and—with the embrace of Theory and, more recently, Big Data—close reading.

There are, however, a number of justifications for the study of book reviews by academics, and especially in the Australian context. To begin with, book reviews form part of the history of the book in Australia. Literary journalism has been, for periods of time, the dominant mode of consideration of Australian literature. Until the institutionalisation of Australian Literature as a discipline in the academy from the mid-1950s, it was public critics, not academics, who were responsible for describing and evaluating the national literature. This critical interest in Australian literature outside academia continues to be influential—more influential, in fact, that most work produced from within. Veronica Brady and Christopher Lee as well as David Carter have noted that '[o]utside the universities there are prominent independent critics' who have 'a more direct influence than academic critics on publishers, readers and editors' (Carter 258; Brady and Lee 278). The justifications mounted by Michael Heyward for Text Publishing's *Australian Classics* series—which coincided with the publication of Geordie Williamson's *The Burning Library* and the 'Australian Literature 101' series of public talks at the Wheeler Centre^[1]—were predicated on what we contend is the false assumption that academics have neglected Australian literature in their research and teaching (Dunn). A generous interpretation of this charge is that Literary Studies academics find it difficult to get their research into the public sphere due to, for example, the cost of access to academic publications and conferences. These difficulties are compounded by the institutional disincentives academics face—such as the ERA national research evaluation framework and internal publication rankings—when they want to engage in public acts of criticism such as book reviewing.

Another reason book reviewing requires scholarly attention is that new literature continues to be given its first critical scrutiny in book reviews. This means that reviewers play an important role in setting the agenda in terms of the way an individual text is engaged with and understood. At one time,

the academic study of literature was retrospective and historical. Graff has shown that it took a long time for the teaching and research of contemporary literature not to be dismissed as merely 'impressionistic' and 'subjective' (136-7). Meanwhile, the job of the book reviewer, as Virginia Woolf explained it in her 1939 essay 'Reviewing', has always been to 't[a]k[e] the measure of new books as they f[a]ll from the press' (119). Book reviews are instrumental in determining a text's literary value. A fundamental expectation of book reviews by readers, writers and critics alike is that they answer the question, 'Is the book any good or not?' (Pool, *Faint Praise* 11; Bishop; Goldsworthy 21). As Pool has argued, this evaluative role is important because it 'build[s] careers and reputations' (*Faint Praise* 9). Book reviews are used—and indeed written—by the people who sit on prize committees, program literary festivals, order for libraries and bookstores, and commission for publication. These are activities that have an impact on sales and also promulgate literary value. Academic Literary Studies is, whether it likes it or not, also involved in evaluative acts. Propounding and protecting and, more recently, interrogating and extending the canon are functions of Literary Studies as a discipline. Despite the decanonising impulse underlying many approaches in Literary Studies over the past four decades, academics inevitably continue to exercise literary judgement by designing syllabuses as well as choosing research topics for conference papers, publications and grant applications. As Robert J. Meyer-Lee argues, 'an inherited commitment to literary value remains concealed within critical and textual approaches that otherwise disclaim or simply ignore it' (336). He notes that recent studies into the question of literary value tend to

a priori eliminate consideration of a vast array of manners in which literature has been, in fact, valued, especially outside the research domain of the academy. For, regardless of what the nature of literary value may be, literature has always been valued by diverse agents for diverse reasons. (339)

The important point here is that these various 'acts of valuing' do not take place independently of one another: Meyer-Lee argues that literary value is best understood in terms of the complicated networks of acts of valuing that constitute it, including those that take place beyond the academy in the pages of the print and, increasingly, online media. The explicit evaluation taking place in book reviews is imbricated in the much more implicit evaluation that forms part of the daily work of Literary Studies academics.

II. Quantifying the field of book reviewing

The field of book reviewing is difficult to quantify as a whole, much less to track changes over time. The challenges it presents are manifold, but two are key. Firstly, there is a problem of its diversity. Reviewing takes place across a range of publication types—from broadsheet- and tabloid-formatted national, metropolitan and regional newspapers, to specialist journals and magazines. In addition to these there are amateur ‘born digital’ book reviews such as appear on online platforms such as Goodreads, LibraryThing and Amazon, as well as the burgeoning fields of book blogging and BookTubing (see for example Murray). Then there are semi-professional sites like *The Newtown Review of Books* that offer edited content but do not pay their writers. Second, and arguably most importantly, there is a problem of scale. There were more than 3,500 books reviewed in Australian publications in 2015.^[2] The time and money it takes to produce a dataset from a pool of this size is significant—much more than an individual academic working to a publications target set by her home institution can justify. It is work best done in collaboration: another problem for Literary Studies academics, who have traditionally worked alone. Money also helps: the laborious manual collection, although it requires attentiveness, need not be done by the researchers themselves and might be completed by paid research assistants.^[3] But it is difficult for Literary Studies academics to access such support as they have struggled to attract Australian Research Council grants^[4] and their linkage opportunities are hamstrung by the fact that their most likely industry partners are, likewise, cash-strapped and under-resourced.

It has fallen to feminist literary organisations VIDA: Women in Literary Arts in the United States and The Stella Prize in Australia to compile statistics on specific aspects of book reviewing across a range of publications. VIDA has been counting 39 of what they call ‘Tier 1’ publications in the U.S. and U.K., with the aim of verifying gender disparity in terms of reviewers and authors reviewed since 2010. For six years now they have been producing their now trademark blue and red pie charts that have consistently shown a ‘sloped playing field’ as far as men and women’s representation in ‘the pages of venues that are known to further one’s career’ is concerned. The most prestigious publications, the *London Review of Books* and *The New York Review of Books* amongst them, have proven to be the least equitable and the least likely to show even minor shifts or fluctuations (VIDA). The Stella Prize, in part inspired by VIDA and incensed by the conditions that led to 2009 and 2011’s ‘sausage-fest’ shortlists for the Miles Franklin Literary Award, began its counting of book reviews in 2012. This Count has formed part of a broader program of feminist literary activism that includes a women’s-only annual literary prize worth \$50,000 and curriculum intervention in secondary schools. The 2012 Count included only the gender of authors of books reviewed. In 2013, this expanded to include the gender of reviewers. Since 2014, we have been collaborating with the Stella Prize to produce the statistics for the Count. For 2014, we expanded the scope of

the count to include review size and genre of books reviewed. The 2015 Stella Count has also included reviewer occupation. Our aim in working with the Stella Count is to produce the most detailed set of statistics about a nation's contemporary reviewing culture to date.

The statistics produced by both VIDA and Stella have triggered voluminous commentary, much of it critical of the publications involved and in favour of change. Gender bias in the book reviewing field was treated as news, but counts of this type are not new, neither overseas nor here in Australia. Nor are the kind of excuses trotted out for the disparity: that women pitch less and say no more than men and that the bias is an unconscious and unintended result of the fact that men write more of the books sent out by publishers for review or that are of potential interest to publication's readers (Case; Caplan and Palko 16). Studies of this kind have their momentary time in the sun and are then forgotten, and this seems to be part of a larger cycle that identifies women's disadvantage and then forgets that it exists, with no real change having been effected. As Pool says, the publishing industry isn't good at remembering these battles, however high-profile they have been ('Book Reviewing' 10), but reminding industry and activist players that there has been a history of such battles is a way that academics can usefully intervene in the field.

Past counts—in Australia and overseas—range from the small and ad hoc to the large and totalising. Mark Davis in his 1997 book *Gangland*, for example, reports gender inequality, on top of an entrenched generational divide, in a somewhat extemporised survey of a four-week period in *The Australian* from 21 October 1995 to 11 December 1995:

In the first week the reviews kicked off with a feature review of an autobiography by a male writer, accompanied by a review of some male childhood reminiscences. The following week the book pages were dominated by three feature reviews of biographies of prominent men. The next week these same pages opened with another feature review of a biography of a prominent man. Inside were two long reviews, one of a biography of a prominent man and another of an autobiography of a prominent man. The following week's pages also opened with a full-page feature review of a biography of a prominent man. Most of the reviews over a two-month period were also by middle-aged men, the overwhelming majority reviewing books by men. If feature reviews alone are counted, the pro-male bias is much higher. (127-8)

Other counts have been more complete. For example, in 2004 Paula J. Caplan and Mary Ann Palko tallied 53 consecutive weeks of the *New York Times Book Review*, the largest outlet in the U.S., from 2002 to 2003 and found that

more than twice as many book authors and almost twice as many reviewers were male as female. Specifically, out of 807 books reviewed only 227, or 28%, were authored by women. Of the 775 reviews only 265, or 34%, were by women reviewers.

In their report they note that a similar count of the *New York Times Book Review* had taken place previously in the 1980s 'after Marilyn French and approximately 100 other women writers protested the three-to-one, male-to-female ratio for authors and reviewers' (16). There have been a number of other counts besides: for example, by D. H. and C. M. Noble of 12 U.K.-based newspapers from 1 October to 21 December 1973 (Noble) and Pool of the *New York Times Book Review*, *New York Review of Books*, *The New Republic* and *BookForum* in 2006-2007 ('Book Reviewing' 9).

The most complete count that has been conducted to date was by the U.K.-based organisation, Women in Publishing, which was established in March 1979 by Anne McDermid, Liz Calder and the two co-founders of Virago Press, Ursula Owen and Australian Carmen Callil 'to promote the status of women working in publishing and related trades'. At a June 1985 meeting, it was decided that the organisation would produce a systematic survey of the national book reviewing field over a period of one year 'to find out whether there was bias and, if so, to what extent' (Women in Publishing 1-2). They counted 28 publications across the spectrum of 'highbrow to popular', looking at 12 issues per publication in 1985. The result was a study examining 5,018 reviews for the length and prominence of review and the genre and publisher of the books reviewed (6). Their results were published in a book called *Reviewing the Reviews: A Woman's Place on the Book Page* (1987). In short, they found that 'whether [publications] are to the left or right of the political spectrum, a quality Sunday newspaper or a literary magazine, devoted to humour or education, their book sections are concerned mainly with reviewing books by men' (10). This forgotten study has been instrumental to our thinking about the data collection for our project.

While it might seem strange that the majority of the comprehensive data on book reviewing has been carried out by feminists outside of the academy, this reflects the different imperatives of activist and academic statistical collection. In the context of feminist activism, detailed statistics speak to problems in a way that more indicative or anecdotal accounts do not. Explaining her decision to initiate the VIDA Count with co-founder Cate Marvin back in 2009, Erin Belieu has argued that those who encounter gender bias often face accusations that they are 'misreading' the situation and that the VIDA Count gives these people 'a powerful political voice, actual data to point to, and a rallying point': 'We at VIDA aren't big fans of anecdote. Anecdote is too easy to dismiss' (117). Anecdote is on the level of the particular occurrence; data is collective. Anecdote is coloured by the individual who tells it; data has the hardness of fact. While data might

provide proof, it has not brought about real change. Pool, writing in 2008, noted:

I wrote an article on sexism in magazines back in the eighties and diligently counted names of women on mastheads (no higher math involved). I could not have imagined that I would still be counting twenty years later. I question whether such tallies are effective. Clearly, to show that a disparity exists, we need the evidence the numbers provide. But numbers don't tell the whole story. ('Book Reviewing' 9)

We agree with Pool: numbers do not tell the whole story. The whole story requires an understanding of literary and media history. We also note that data is not objective: it is another form of argument, and the product of decisions about what to count and in what terms. As Bode and Murphy note, data is 'an outcome of multiple decisions, and based on arguments, not certainties, regarding degrees of bias, reliability, and purpose' (177). However, collecting this kind of data provides opportunities for much thicker descriptions of the field of book reviewing. This paper is just a beginning.

III. Our study

This paper begins to extend the comprehensive counting of reviews to include aspects of the book reviewing field that are not limited to gender. For this paper, we collected detailed statistics on book reviews published in *The Australian* and *ABR* for the full years of 1985 and 2013.^[5] In creating our data we counted each review as either a capsule, a composite or a feature. The feature review takes a single book as its subject and tends to be between 600 and 1000 words. A capsule review is generally less than 400 words and is usually grouped together with other short reviews, often written by the same people across issues. A composite review considers several books inside a single review. For each review, we recorded information including: the date and title of the review, the author, title, genre and publisher of the book reviewed, the reviewer's name, gender and occupation (where available), and the length and prominence of the review. This data includes 2,308 instances of book reviewing across 21 fields in Australia in 1985 and 2013, amounting to more than 48,000 cells of data.

The statistics reported here refer to *books reviewed* because we chose to count each instance of a book being reviewed in order to be specific about the number of both the individual titles and book authors being reviewed. In other words, composite reviews have been counted for each book reviewed. We also make a distinction between *books reviewed* and *individual titles reviewed*. This is necessary because individual books are sometimes reviewed more than once in the same publication in the same year. There are limitations to our data: we have not counted reviews of children's or

Young Adult books, nor do we include extracts from books or feature articles on and interviews with authors. Regarding children's books, we recognise that their omission means that our statistics do not include a significant part of the field. In the case of extracts, feature articles and interviews, we acknowledge that their increasing prominence in the book pages between 1985 and 2013 deserves analysis. Anecdotally, we can report that there does seem to be a patterned relationship between these parts of the book pages and the feature reviews. Certainly, these modes of literary journalism are also involved in similar evaluative acts as the reviews that sit beside them in the printed newspaper and magazine.

We chose to begin our collection of statistics across a range of periodicals with *The Australian* and *ABR* because they (1) are national publications; (2) offer the largest coverage of books in the Australian context; (3) have high visibility; (4) have large circulations; and (5) are, arguably, two of the most prestigious sites for reviews in the country. Regarding prestige, *ABR* receives more funding from the Australia Council than any other literary magazine, in recognition 'for [its] national leadership in artistic excellence and the critical role [it] plays in the Australian arts landscape'. In a climate of cuts, *ABR* secured four-year funding to the tune of \$560,000 (Australia Council). It is also supported by two universities, Monash and Flinders, and attracts significant private philanthropy, including from high-profile writers, judges and QCs, and Order of Australia recipients. *ABR* estimates its combined readership to be over 50,000 and its website hits at over 175,000 per year (*ABR*).

As for *The Australian*, its prestige in the field accrues as a result of its circulation numbers, comprehensiveness, regularity and pay rates, which at 70 cents per word for reviews is amongst the highest in the country. If it is still true that the Saturday book pages 'are the writing and publishing world's public face', as Davis asserts in *Gangland*, then it is in *The Australian* that we come closest to meeting it (127). We acknowledge that the prestige of these publications is not, perhaps, consistent over the period 1985 to 2013; the proliferation, and diffusion, of venues for book reviewing, especially online, has made inroads. But this, in itself, offers yet another reason to track the changes to the book reviewing field over time. There is one final reason we have chosen these specific publications: *The Australian* and *ABR* are rare examples of continuity in what Nettie Palmer once called 'the inconsecutive nature of our literary life in Australia' (xxxix).^[6] Since 1985, numerous publications printing book reviews such as the *National Review*, *National Times*, *Australian Literary Review* (twice) and *Scripsi* have come and gone. Other periodicals—amongst them *Meanjin*, the latter expressly founded by Clem Christesen to produce 'a core of sound literary criticism' (Cunningham 16; Carter 270)—ceased including book reviews in their issues.

One of the reasons we have chosen 1985 as our comparison year for 2013 is because of the potential it offers for transnational analysis alongside the Women in Publishing study. The mid-1980s also represents a moment in Australian literary history worth studying in its own right. In *Reading By Numbers*, Bode identifies this as a high-water mark in Australian women's publishing; 'in the 1980s,' she writes, 'Australian women novelists were increasingly present on the lists of local literary presses and considerably more likely to receive critical attention than at any other time since the end of the Second World War' (148). Our study tests some of Bode's speculations about the shifts in the gendering of critical authority in this period of Australian literary history.

Part of the motivation for this particular study has been to track book reviewing over time. Past instances of counting have tended to be localised and isolated. Despite the fact that the VIDA and Stella Counts have now been running for six and four years respectively, it will be a long time before we can verify that the slight fluctuations in gender disparity across publications they are identifying from year to year constitute anything like real changes to the field as far as gender is concerned. A 1985 dataset means we have the measure by which change across a number of different features can be proven. The time gap also allows us to track the consequences of the seismic shifts in the book reviewing space brought about as a consequence of the transformations newspapers and magazines are grappling with due to the digital revolution.

IV. Gender

In her study of trends in the publication and discussion of Australian writers, Bode finds that

the progressive and broad-ranging growth in women's authorship of Australian novels since the 1970s was accompanied, in the 1990s and 2000s, by a reversion—in this most public and widely read forum for discussion of Australian literature [newspapers]—to a focus on men. (162)

Our study of Australian book reviewing has not found a resurgence of interest in male authors, but rather a continuity in the relative lack of interest in books by women in the reviews pages of *The Australian* and *ABR* in 1985 and 2013. Bode's data indicates that in 1985 40% of the top 20 Australian authors mentioned in Australian newspapers were women (Austlit). Our data indicates that rates of reviewing of women's writing were lower than this in 1985, and continue to be so. In these publications, books authored by women were significantly less likely to be reviewed than books authored by men in both 1985 and 2013 [**Figure 1**].

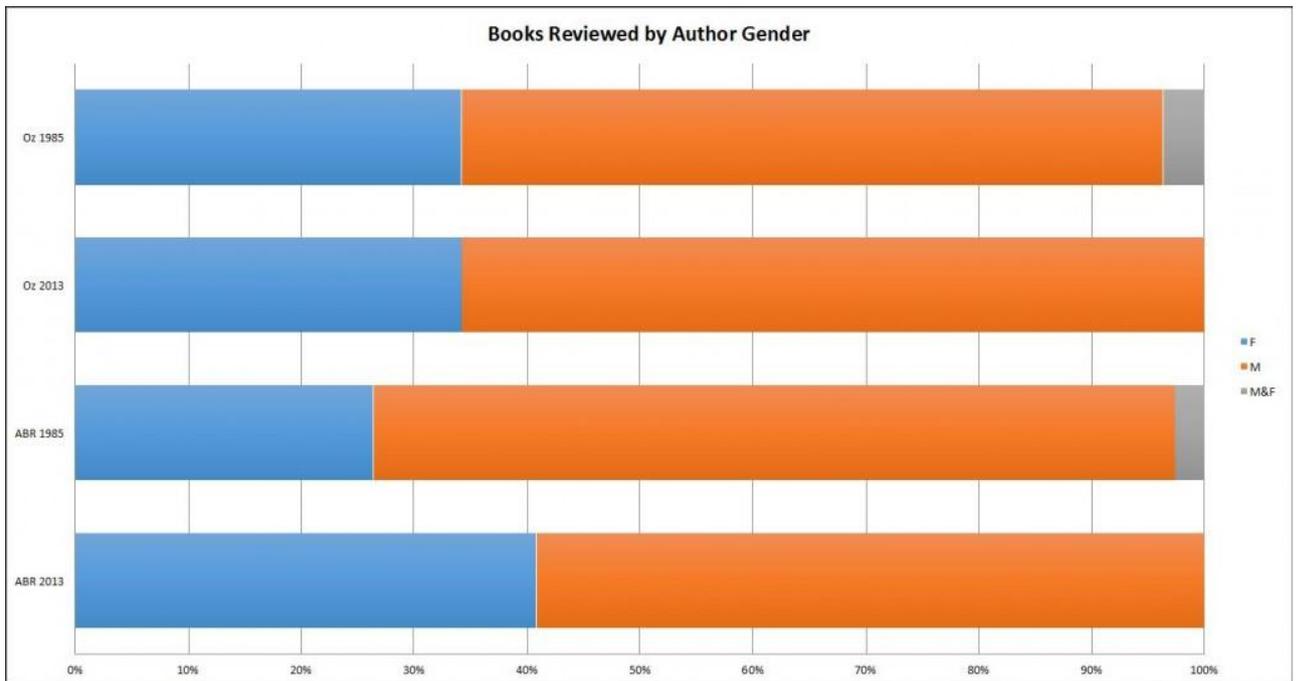


Figure 1: Books Reviewed by Author Gender

Books written by women constituted 33% of books reviewed in *The Australian* in 1985 and 34% in 2013. In the Stella Counts of 2014 and 2015 the percentages of books by women reviewed in *The Australian* were 31% and 36% respectively. In *ABR*, the percentage of books reviewed that were authored by women has increased from 26% in 1985 to 41% in 2013, then back to 38% and 34% in 2014 and 2015.

Bode wonders whether men 'dominate[...] the reviewing of Australian novels: whether they stand as arbiters as well as the exemplars of cultural value in the contemporary field' (167). According to our dataset, the answer to this is: yes. In *ABR*, the majority of book reviews were and continue to be, written by men, although there has been some shifting of the ground: women reviewed 26% of books in 1985 and 39% in 2013. There is an even more interesting story to tell about gender in *The Australian*. To our surprise, women reviewed 62% of all books in *The Australian* in 1985 [Figure 2].

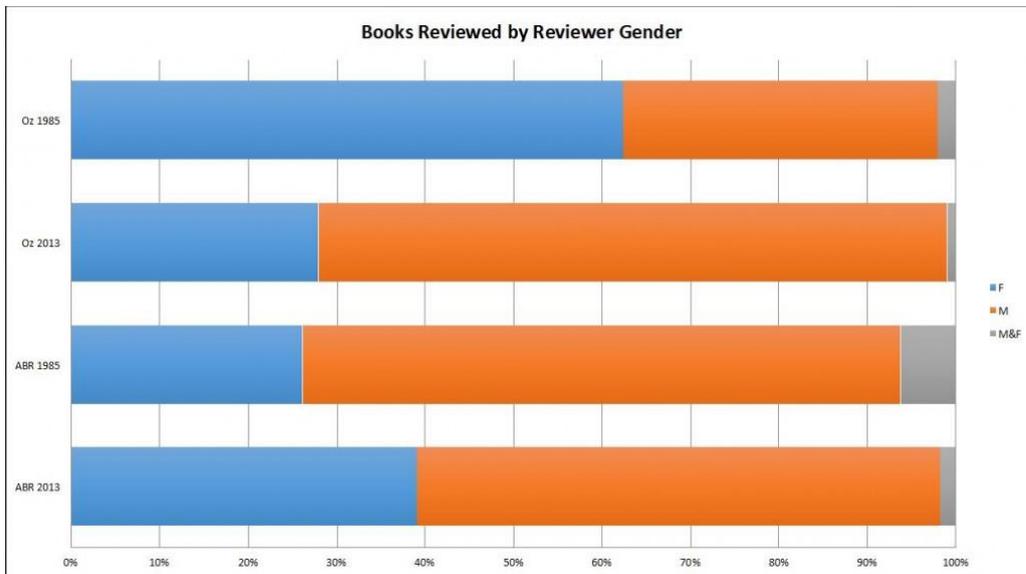


Figure 2: Books Reviewed by Reviewer Gender

When we looked more closely at the data, we discovered that, of the 639 books reviewed in *The Australian* in 1985, 468 were capsule reviews written by two women: Sandra Hall, then literary editor of *The Australian*, and Vicki Wright, who was responsible for the regular 'Paperbacks Worth Having' column in the paper. We discuss what we are calling the 'Hall-Wright Effect' in further detail below, but note that for feature and composite reviews in *The Australian* in 1985 the gender split is very similar to that of ABR: that is, women reviewers are responsible for only 32% of the books reviewed compared with 68% men. In *The Australian* in 2013 even fewer books are reviewed by women. Including Hall and Wright, the percentage of books reviewed by women in *The Australian* has dropped from 62% to 28%. Excluding Hall and Wright, it has dropped from 32% to 28%. This shift seems to be continuing: in the 2015 Stella Count, 26% of books in *The Australian* were reviewed by women.

We also found that men overwhelmingly review books written by men. In *The Australian* in 1985, 74% of all book reviews written by men were of books by men; this statistic did not change in 2013, and the numbers are very similar at ABR. Women, however, review books by both men and women [Figure 3].

	<i>The Australian</i>		<i>ABR</i>	
	1985	2013	1985	2013
Reviews by men of books by men (%)	74	74	77	74
Reviews by women of books by women (%)	40	57	47	37

Figure 3: Book Author Gender by Gender of Reviewer

Bode describes an ‘essentialist model of cultural production and consumption’ in which it is assumed that ‘only a male author would interest a male audience, while only a female author would interest—and deign to write for—female readers’ (137). Our statistics confirm this essentialism at work in relation to male reviewers, but suggest that it is also compounded by a form of male universalism, which assumes that books by men are for everybody but books by women are only for women.

We also scrutinised the reviewer statistics more closely to investigate the size of the reviewing pool by gender. The pool of individual reviewers at *The Australian* has increased over time but in both 1985 and 2013 the pool of male reviewers was more than twice the size of that of female reviewers [**Figure 4**]. A constituent of critical authority is regularity of output in a single outlet; the reviewer accrues influence thanks to an association with a respected masthead. These numbers suggest that there are significant impediments to women reviewers developing this kind of authority, especially recently: in 1985 in *The Australian*, there were four women in the top ten reviewers by number of books reviewed; in 2013, this had dropped to one woman in the top ten. There were significantly more women writing ten or more reviews each in 1985 than in 2013. In 2013, the highest number of reviews produced by a man reviewer was 30; by a woman it was 13.

	<i>The Australian</i>				<i>ABR</i>			
	1985		2013		1985		2013	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Total reviewers	62	27	121	55	110	44	85	48
10 or more reviews	12	7	9	3	6	2	0	0
In top 10 reviewers	6	4	9	1	7	3	6	4

Figure 4: Individual Reviewers

ABR has had a larger pool of reviewers across the period, which is unsurprising given the breadth of subject matter covered in the magazine, especially in its nonfiction reviews. The representation of women in the top ten reviewers in *ABR* is much higher than in *The Australian* but remains at a glass ceiling of three in 1985 and four in 2013. *ABR* has clearly increased its pool of women reviewers, and across the board repeat reviews are less likely. We might conclude from these figures that the book reviewing in 2013 is more polyvocal, which is arguably a good thing for the field. However, it is a bad thing for the professional reviewer, whose reputation depends upon repeat reviewing. Commentators talk about the decline of the public intellectual: perhaps changes in the field—which coincide with the demise of the Pascall Prize’s Australian Critic of the Year award after 27 years—mean she can no longer exist.

V. The shape and size of the field

Upon first glance, the space allocated to books in *The Australian* increased from two to seven pages between 1985 and 2013. This would seem to support Nolan and Ricketson’s findings that in the first decade of the 21st century ‘[l]iterary pages actually increased in a number of newspapers, including *The Age*, *The Weekend Australian*, and the *Canberra Times*’ (Nolan and Ricketson). Despite the increasing page space, there was, in fact, a dramatic drop in the number of books being reviewed between 1985 and 2013 [Figure 5]. The number of books reviewed in *The Australian* dropped by 48% between 1985 and 2013, from 1025 to 533. In *ABR* we find a comparable increase in page space (issues ran up to 45 pages in 1985 compared to up to 71 pages in 2013) and drop in the number of books being reviewed of 39%, from 466 to 284.

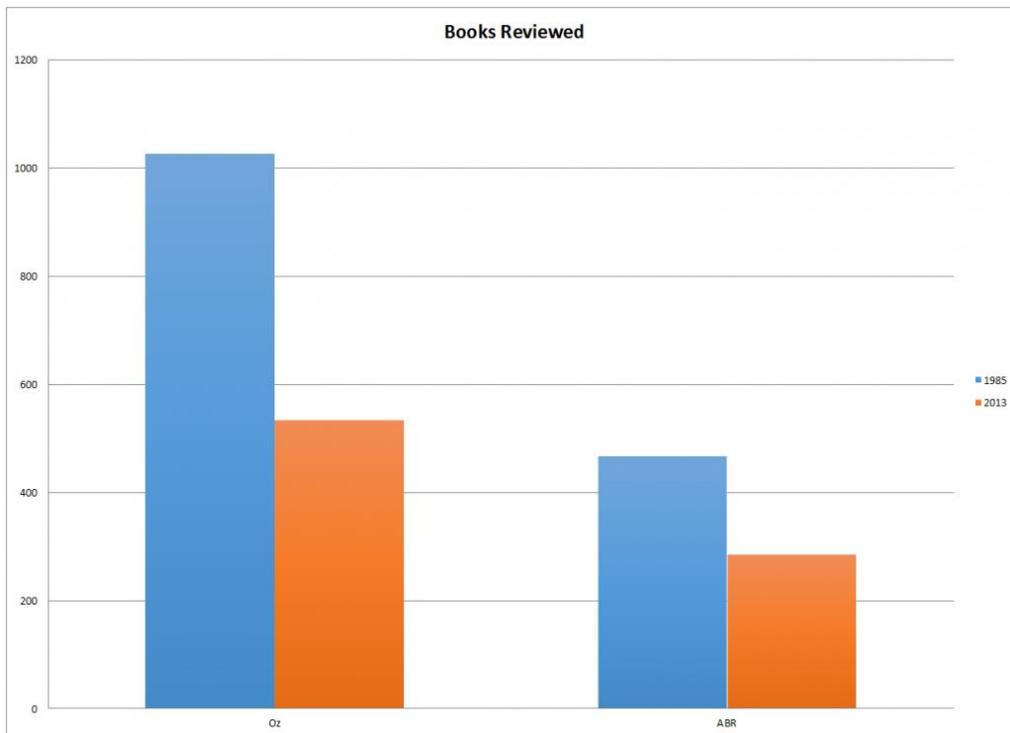


Figure 5: Books Reviewed

This discrepancy between page space and the number of books reviewed can be explained, firstly, by changes in layout and design. In 1985, *The Australian's* book pages were printed as a standalone tabloid-formatted supplement. Compared with the 2013 book pages—which now appear in an arts supplement called 'Review', consisting of a combination of music, visual arts, film and television coverage and op. ed. pieces—the 1985 books pages are much harder on the eye: there is less white space, and the font size and line spacing is smaller. But the discrepancy can also be explained by increases in advertising space as well as the number of feature articles, essays, interviews and excerpts published.

The decreasing scope and increasing length of Australian book reviews reflect a shift away from reportage and towards opinion and analysis in Australian news media over the past fifty years. McLaren identifies a shift of emphasis towards editorials and feature articles taking place in the 1960s; this has only increased over the three decades since 1981, when he was writing (McLaren 245). In the specific case of *ABR*, this shift can be explained by modifications to its remit since its inception in 1978. *ABR* began its life with a policy of 'noticing every Australian book published'. The challenge of this endeavour quickly became apparent so the policy shifted in 1979 to noticing 'all imaginative writing—poetry, drama and fiction—by a review matched in length to the importance of the book, and to notice all other books initially with a short notice' (McLaren 250). *ABR* has

since broadened its potential scope by reviewing books by international authors but this has not resulted in an increase in the total number of books reviewed. In 1985 *ABR* published 451 reviews of books by Australian authors and 14 from overseas; in 2013 there were 196 reviews of books by Australian authors and 87 from overseas. In other words, *ABR* devoted 97% of its reviews in 1985 to books by Australian authors. That number dropped to 69% in 2013. When you consider that the overall number of reviews published has fallen by 39%, this is a staggering decrease in *ABR*'s scrutiny of new books by Australian authors.

The shrinkage in the number of books reviewed indicated by our statistics is not unique to *The Australian* and *ABR*. Sybil Nolan and Matthew Ricketson's study of copy-sharing across Australian newspapers reveals both a reduction in the page space allocated to book reporting and reviews in the Fairfax papers, and an increase in the practice of copy-sharing, which sees reviews reprinted across newspapers run by the same company. This results in fewer books being reviewed and less diversity of published opinion for the ones that are reviewed. They cite *The Age*'s Literary Editor, Jason Steger, who confirms: 'it's fair to say we are no longer scrutinising as many as we have in the past. And because we are increasingly sharing reviews, it means that we do not have as many critical voices as we used to' (Nolan and Ricketson).

The shrinkage of the book reviewing field we, and others, observe is significant when you take into account the number of books published in Australia each year. Some 28,234 books were published in Australia in 2013 (Coronel 4). According to the Stella Count, 3,883 books were reviewed in Australia in 2013. That is only a 14% chance of landing an Australian-based review. Going by the Stella Count statistics for 2014 and 2015, the total number of reviews published in Australia is dropping by 150 each year, meaning that the chance of landing an Australian-based review is decreasing by a rate of around 5%. [7] More than 7,000 of the books published in Australia in 2013 were by Australian authors (Coronel 4). The sum total of books reviewed in *The Australian* and *ABR* for 2013 is 817. If, as our *ABR* statistics indicate, roughly half of these are by Australian authors, then 6% of Australian books are reviewed in either of these publications. We acknowledge that not all books need reviewing and that some books need reviewing more than others. That said, many Australian books go missing in this step in the chain from author to reader—especially those written by women.

VI. Review type and length

The apparent disparity between increasing page space and decreasing number of books being reviewed can also be explained by changes in the

length, and therefore the nature, of book reviews over this period. The major shift we found between 1985 and 2013 is the increasing proportion of feature reviews in both publications. In *The Australian*, the proportion of feature reviews has increased from 42% to 72% [Figure 6]. In *ABR*, feature reviews have jumped from 36% to 74% of all reviews. This represents a redistribution of the book pages in these publications. Arguably, it has become a less democratic space than it once was, with the drop in the total number of reviews compounded by the diminishment of the capsule. The book pages are being recast from a space of near-comprehensive noting of new books to one of highlighting major releases. The opportunities for authors and works to be discussed in these pages has significantly diminished.

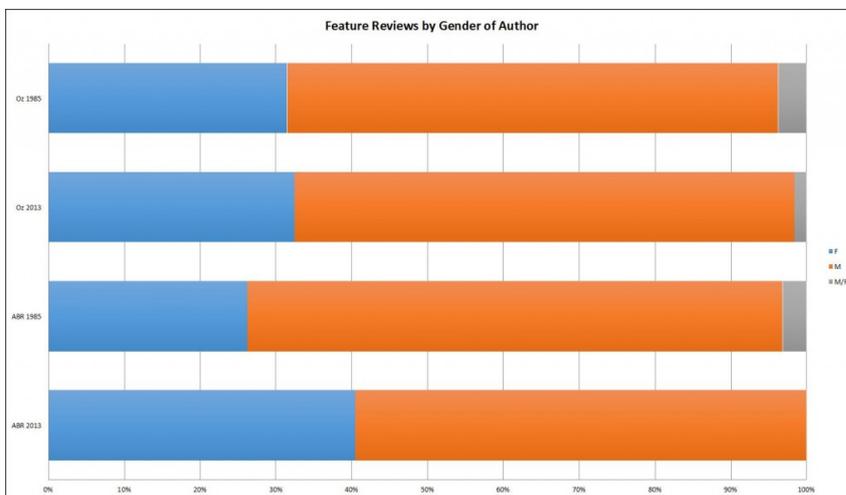


Figure 6: Type of Review

When we consider these statistics regarding review type and length alongside gender some doubling down in terms of bias becomes apparent. In *The Australian* in 1985, the vast majority of books reviewed by women—that is 468 of 637 books, or 74%—were capsules. The majority of these capsules were written by only two women: Sandra Hall, who wrote 112 of the 468 capsules, and Vicki Wright, who wrote the remaining 346. Anyone who has reviewed a book for money knows that it doesn't pay to divide the dollars earned reading the book and writing about it by the time spent. But, equally, anyone who has reviewed a book for money knows that it is economically more worthwhile to review one book at 900 words than 300 words. Writing capsule reviews isn't easy—conveying a sense of the book and offering some analysis in a small amount of space is a kind of art. Hall and Wright were, we submit, literary-critical sandwich-makers in the sense that they were responsible for doing the low-status, high-volume work in the field.

But it is in the most high-profile and prestigious real estate of the book pages—the feature review—that the discrepancy between male and female authors and reviewers is most apparent. In *The Australian* in 1985, only 31% of feature reviews were of books authored by women; and as reviewers, women were responsible for 30% of all feature reviews: this is significant given that women are responsible for more than 60% of reviews overall in *The Australian* in that year. The statistics are similar for both publications across 1985 and 2013 [Figure 7]. From the most recent Stella Count, these figures seem fairly representative of the field as a whole: for all Australian publications in 2015, 66% of feature reviews were of books authored by men, and 62% of the total number of feature reviews were written by men. [8]

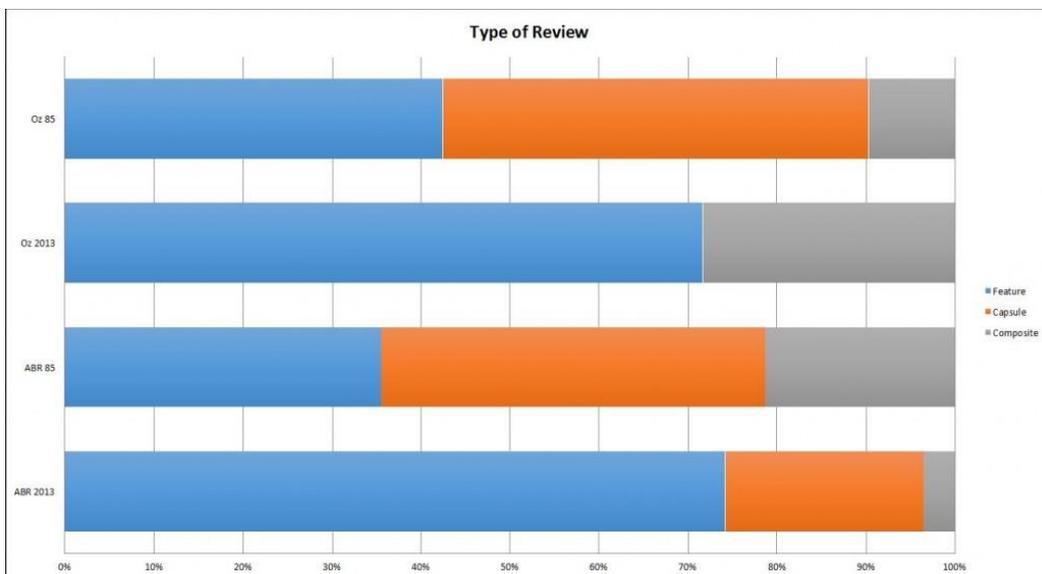


Figure 7: Feature Reviews by Gender of Author

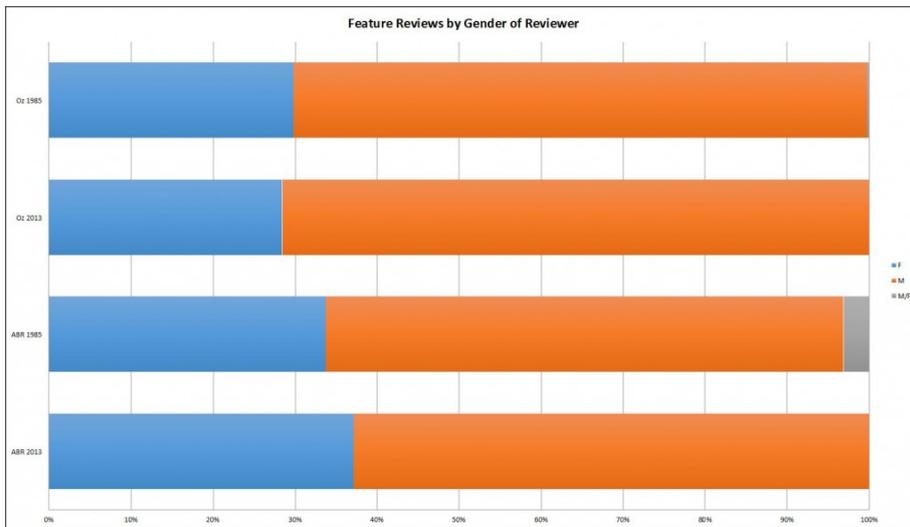


Figure 8: Feature Reviews by Gender of Reviewer

TABLE

Figure 9: Reviewers of Features

In terms of individual reviewers' involvement in the writing of feature reviews, we found that in *The Australian* in 1985 the top five reviewers by number of feature reviews were all men [Figure 9]. In 2013 the top five included one woman, Miriam Cosic, tying for fifth place with James Bradley and Peter Pierce. We speculate that the fact that Cosic is not a freelance reviewer like Bradley and Pierce but employed as a journalist at *The Australian* goes some way to explaining this. Of the reviewers who wrote more than one feature review in these publications in 1985 and 2013, women constituted 38% and 40% in *ABR* and 29% to 33% in *The Australian*. In relation to feature reviews, the balance of critical authority in each of these publications is decidedly male.

VIII. Conclusions and points for future discussion

While the Stella and VIDA pies show ongoing disparity between the reviewing of books by men and women, what they do not show is the ways in which the field as a whole is shrinking and changing shape. On top of the reduction in the number of books being reviewed each year in the Australian print media, the focus of reviews has shifted from coverage or reportage of the field to longer-form discussion. In 2013, if a book is reviewed it is likely to get more attention, but for authors there are fewer chances to have a critic evaluate their work in traditional outlets. Although it appears that

gender disparity across time has remained fairly constant, in some respects it is more problematic now than in 1985 because of the fact that men are more likely to be author and subject of the most prestigious and increasingly dominant form of review: the feature review.

In terms of gender, disparity in the scrutiny of books has changed across time in different ways. In the 1980s, a period in which 'the proportion and number of Australian novels by women increased considerably' (Bode 143), we might have expected to see some significant interest in books authored by women in major Australian reviewing periodicals. We found that this was not the case. As mentioned above, books by women represented less than a third of all those reviewed in *The Australian* and *ABR* in 1985. We find the recurring 60-70:40-30 ratio of gender disparity curious. It occurs in other fields too: a recent survey of artists and subjects of the Archibald Prize, for example, found women's representation sitting largely at the 28-37% mark (Jefferson). The 'glass escalator' effect, in which men stay at the top of the publishing world despite it being a female-dominated industry (Bode 165) might be in effect here. It seems that 40% is some kind of limit beyond which women's representation in the books pages (and indeed in other cultural spheres) will not go for fear that something—male readers, prestige?—will be lost.

This research is a small step towards a history of book reviewing in Australia, and there is clearly much more to do. We have also found significant shifts in the genre of books being published, the occupation of reviewers, and the publishers of books being reviewed. We are also keen to trace the afterlife of the review and its influence on academic literary criticism. This paper is an intervention into the long history of counting, documenting and forgetting gender bias in the field of book reviewing that has largely taken place outside of the academy. By bringing scholarly attention to bear on these questions, we can begin to understand how these statistics showing gender bias fit into broader histories of literature and publishing in Australia, and map the changes in the scale and shape of the field.

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[sta_anchor id="bio"]Julianne Lamond is Lecturer in English at Australian National University and editor of Australian Literary Studies. She has published essays on Australian writers (including Rosa Praed, Barbara Baynton, Miles Franklin and Christos Tsiolkas), gender and Australian

literary culture, the history of reading, and popular fiction at the turn of the twentieth century.

Notes

[1] The Wheeler Centre, opened in February 2016 and located in Melbourne's CBD, houses numerous literary organisations and programs talks by local and international writers and thinkers throughout the year.

[2] We wish to acknowledge the collection done by Anna MacDonald and Jayne Regan, who worked as paid Research Assistants on our 1985 and 2013 datasets, and Imogen Mathew and Ashley Orr, who worked as paid Research Assistants on the 2015 Stella Count. We also wish to acknowledge the financial support of the ANU College of the Arts and Social Sciences, the ANU Gender Institute, as well as the Faculty of Arts and Centre for the Book at Monash University in this research.

[3] We wish to acknowledge the collection done by Anna MacDonald and Jayne Regan, who worked as paid Research Assistants on our 1985 and 2013 datasets, and Imogen Mathew and Ashley Orr, who worked as paid Research Assistants on the 2015 Stella Count. We also wish to acknowledge the financial support of the ANU College of the Arts and Social Sciences, the ANU Gender Institute, as well as the Faculty of Arts and Centre for the Book at Monash University in this research.

[4] In the 2016 ARC Discovery Project Scheme round, only three proposals with the FoR Code 2005 In the 2016 ARC Discovery Project Scheme round, only three proposals with the FoR Code 2005 (Literary Studies) were granted funding out of a total of 635 successful applications—i.e., only 0.47% of the total number of funded projects. This is down from 0.75% in 2015 (ARC).

[5] We include the weekend editions of *The Australian* from 5-6 January to December 21-22 for both 1985 and 2013, and each of the ten issues of *Australian Book Review*—from February/March to December/January in 1985 and from February to December/January in 2013. In both 1985 and 2013 there were two bimonthly and eight monthly issues of the *Australian Book Review* published, but the timing of one of the two bimonthly issues is different. The bimonthly issues in 1985 were for February/March and December/January. For 2013, they were July/August and December/January.

[6] *ABR* did lapse completely between 1974 and 1978, but this was before the period of our study (Wilde, Hooton and Andrews 53).

[7] The 2013, 2014 and 2015 Stella Counts noticed a total of 3,883, 3,705 and 3,538 reviews respectively.

[8] The 2015 Stella Count does not distinguish between feature and non-feature reviews, but does include a field for size and a composite/not composite field. For this statistic, we included all medium and large reviews that are not composites.

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How Nice Is Too Nice? Australian Book Reviews and the 'Compliment Sandwich'

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This article responds to an ongoing public debate about whether Australian book reviewing is 'too nice', which started in the literary journal *Kill Your Darlings* in 2010 and has continued in other literary publications. It takes up Ben Etherington's claim that 'too nice' reviewing is characterised by the 'compliment sandwich' in which critique is surrounded by mollifying praise. It offers a 'distant reading' of two years of fiction reviews in the *Australian Book Review*, applying a manual appraisal analysis to demonstrate that book reviews in Australia's flagship reviewing publication do often adhere to the compliment-sandwich form. The article then returns to the question of 'too nice' reviewing, and applies a modified Bourdieusian analysis to examine how reviewing debates have served as proxies for larger disputes between institutions and interlocutors in the literary field.

1. Critiquing the Too-Nice Review

The Melbourne journal, *Kill Your Darlings* (KYD) opened its inaugural issue in March of 2010 with Gideon Haigh's polemic, 'Feeding the Hand that Bites', which bemoaned the 'demise of Australian literary reviewing' (9). Haigh accused reviewers of timidity, arguing that, since they are neither well-paid nor highly esteemed, 'there's little incentive for sticking one's neck out, for actually taking a position, for arguing that a book is bad, or sloppy, or stupid' (10). For Haigh, negative criticism is counterproductive, since 'the author might be reviewing us one day... [i]n which case, it may, of course, be payback time' (10). He argues reviewers avoid critical judgment, preferring to 'summarise the contents, recapitulate the blurb, describe the author's reputation, or examine the author's politics' (10).

Book reviewing seems an unlikely flashpoint for controversy, but Haigh's essay served as a proxy for larger literary debates. When he argues that book reviews 'have become hodgepodes of conventional wisdom and middlebrow advertorial' (9), he rehashes old antipathies between highbrow and middlebrow. He raises concerns about how economics impinge on notions of literary value (however such a term might be construed), when

he bemoans the 'the lacklustre infomerciality of so much Australian reviewing' that gushes 'over the latest vogue' (11). He laments Australian literary culture's insularity by claiming reviewing practices support 'vested interests in Australia's small, snobbish, fashion-conscious, self-celebrating literary scene' (11). Craven book reviews become symptoms of an unhealthy literary culture. Haigh's refraining from naming specific reviewers further created anxiety among critics who wondered if they were the essay's secret target (although this failure to name names—common in critical pieces on book reviewing—may itself be a symptom of a 'too nice' literary culture).

KYD published Haigh's essay to generate controversy and establish the journal as a locus of edgy and important literary conversations. Haigh was an inspired choice for generating media buzz: he had access to wider media networks from his popular sports writing but still possessed a highbrow appeal among literary insiders; in this sense, he crossed the domains of popular and high culture that Pierre Bourdieu describes as the key opposition within the literary field (Bourdieu 53). When Haigh read the essay at *KYD*'s launch on March 10, 2010, it was already familiar to much of the audience, who had heard it discussed across a range of media. *The Sydney Morning Herald* ran a short piece about Haigh's essay on February 20, and Haigh appeared on ABC Radio on February 22. *KYD* made an excerpt available online on February 24th and published a response to Haigh by Martin Shaw (then the books division manager of Readings Books Music & Film) on their website the following day. Stephen Romei published another response in *The Australian* on March 2. This was the intention, since this controversy promoted the journal; *KYD* followed up by holding a panel discussion on reviewing with Haigh, Jo Case, and Anthony Morris at Readings on March 17.

Haigh's essay, though tied to the marketing strategies of a new literary journal, also instigated an ongoing debate about Australian literary reviewing. In August of 2011, Louise Pine revisited Haigh's concerns in the *Overland* essay 'To Review or Not to Review', and Melbourne writer Mel Campbell responded in a *Crikey* essay the next day, arguing that 'hatchet job' reviews constitute 'a lazy form of reviewing' ('Hugging with Knives' 2011). Concerns about too-nice reviews then received their most detailed articulation in Ben Etherington's 2013 essay 'The Brain Feign', which critically describes Haigh's essay as 'glint[ing] with aphorisms' but too 'brief when it comes to articulating what is at stake'. Rather than lamenting generalities, Etherington examines the reception of Anna Funder's 2011 novel, *All That I Am*, in a case study of the book's reviews, which locates a 'structural' problem within an insular Australian contemporary literary field^[1], caught between 'print's decline and the self-promotion attending so much activity online' (2013).

The context of Etherington's essay matters, because it was used, along with five others, to launch *The Sydney Review of Books (SRB)*. Like Haigh's article, Etherington's essay had been surreptitiously passed around literary insiders before publication (it was sent to me by the editor of a literary journal who had received it from a festival director), thereby introducing the journal to those in the field with significant stories of social and symbolic capital. The confrontational nature of Etherington's article—which strenuously criticised a much-lauded Australian novel—generated controversy, producing wider interest from readers beyond the field of cultural production. The irony of Etherington's piece (though one he is certainly aware of) is that it criticises the deleterious effects of social media on literary culture while leveraging those same forces to promote *SRB*. The key distinction here is that 'The Brain Feign' also served as the first installment of 'Critic Watch' an ongoing column meant to expose the self-serving reviewing practices Haigh identified.

Despite the appearance of Critic Watch, questions about the niceness of book reviewing have persisted, as evidenced by Kerry Goldsworthy's 2013 'Everyone's a Critic' in the *Australian Book Review* and the 2015 Monash University conference, *Critical Matters*, which presented perspectives on book reviewing from academics and practitioners. But rather than tracking this debate, my interest is in substantiating whether or not book reviews are 'too nice'. Haigh does not produce any evidence to support his claims. Etherington's 'The Brain Feign' employs a case study of Anna Funder's *All That I Am*, a process he repeated in a 2013 examination of the reception of Hannah Kent's *Burial Rites* ('The Real Deal' 2013). But case studies—while they may be able to highlight or substantiate particular lapses of critical reception—work through a large-scale synecdoche, in which the specific instances stand in for a broader set of failings. But individual instances of critical failure are just that, and do not necessarily reflect wider practices.

Etherington implicitly acknowledges the limitations of exemplary case studies in 'The Poet Tasters', which examines the 247 reviews of Australian poetry that appeared in 2013. In this survey, Etherington notes reviewers' frequent use of the 'compliment sandwich', in which critical comments are bookended by vague affirmation according to a set formula:

1. Introduce the volume, the poet and their previous publications.
2. Describe the poet's overall aesthetic with reference to European and/or North American antecedents.
3. Quote approvingly from two or three choice poems with some technical commentary.
4. Express reservations about one or two poems.
5. Affirm, nevertheless, the worthiness of the volume as a whole.

For Etherington, the compliment sandwich is not just lazy, but 'inverts good critical practice'. In the compliment sandwich, criticisms are not 'patiently

explained', so readers must take reviewers' claims on trust rather than on the strength of their analysis. This muted critique also 'weakens the praise' in a review, because such praise is the *default* rather than having 'been won from a determinedly critical disposition' ('The Poet Tasters').

Etherington states that the 'obvious and probably accurate conclusion' is that compliment-sandwich reviews are mostly written by writers afraid of making enemies in a small literary scene. But Etherington's essay expands the critique of too-nice reviewing in two important ways. Instead of using illustrative examples, it analyses aggregated cultural practices of reviewing. Secondly, in identifying the compliment sandwich, Etherington suggests that too-nice reviewing is not simply dispositional, but also *formal*. The compliment sandwich thus constitutes a formal criterion for assessing reviewing—and this is what I have set out to do in a provisional mode by applying a modified form of appraisal theory to a small sample of literary reviews from *The Australian Book Review* to see whether or not they are compliment sandwiches; this pilot study—which applies a novel methodology to a limited sample—gestures toward ways in which aggregate literary practices might be analysed. I will then re-examine the results of my analysis through a Bourdieusian frame, arguing that disputes over 'niceness' reflect key distinctions between agents in the Australian literary field, and thus are of broader significance for understanding contemporary Australian literary culture.

2. Measuring the Compliment Sandwich

I surveyed two years of issues of *Australian Book Review (ABR)*, from September 2013 through August 2015, examining reviews of fiction to see if they matched the formal characteristics of the compliment sandwich. This produced a relative small sample of 78 reviews, which I then analysed for polarity (a linguistic term referring to the orientation of an opinion as positive, negative or neutral) to see whether or not they conformed to the 'compliment sandwich'. This admittedly small and non-random sample would not meet the evidentiary criteria of formal statistics, and I am not claiming that it meets this burden. Given both the novelty of the method I have applied and the time-intensive nature of manual appraisal analysis (which, as I will demonstrate, requires careful, close reading), I worked with a smaller sample to ensure precision, rather than a broader sample that might include significant errors. As a result of this limited sample, however, my results are neither indicative of other reviewing outlets in Australia, nor, necessarily, of *ABR* reviews outside of this designated time period. Nonetheless, I do think these results are a way of partially substantiating Etherington's claims, and also represent another (and, within

the field of literary studies, original) mode of distant reading for analysing aggregates of cultural praxis.

I decided to examine *ABR* (founded in 1961), because it is the longest-running publication devoted to Australian book reviews, although it has had competitors like *SRB*, as well as the now-defunct *Australian Literary Review* (2006-11) and *Australian Review of Books* (1996-2001), both of which ran as inserts in News Corp's *The Australian* newspaper. While *ABR* is the standard-bearer of Australian book reviewing, it often publishes emerging critics, who might produce more formulaic reviewing than in the broadsheets, which employ established reviewers.

A few caveats need to be addressed about the reviews I sampled. I did not consider *all* reviews in the *ABR* from this period, but restricted my analysis to reviews of fiction. I did this because I wanted to be sure my analysis was not affected by the logics of different cultural subfields (such as when Etherington argues that poetry reviews are affected by the closely-knit nature of the poetry community). Moreover, debates about 'niceness' in book reviews have mostly been about fiction reviewing—and *literary* fiction reviewing in particular. Popular fiction reviews don't seem to have entered the debate—though I did not make distinctions between literary and popular works in this survey. [\[2\]](#)

I excluded non-fiction, because it can be considered valuable (by containing unusual information, for example) even if it's deemed faulty or wanting in aspects of style, language or structure. Fiction, on the other hand, is usually assessed in relation to its style, language, characterisation, and narrative, rather than content. Admittedly, this binary breaks down for some works; I excluded reviews of Robert Dessaix's *What Days Are For* (2014) and Martin Edmond's *Battarbee and Namatjira* (2014) because both are technically non-fiction, even though they share many stylistic qualities with fiction. Moreover, many fictional works do refer to important political or social events and issues, and thus encompass more than purely stylistic or formal concerns.

I also excluded reviews of overseas works and republished 'classics', since attacks on the 'niceness' of Australian reviewing typically claim the smallness of the local literary scene is what discourages robust criticism. I also did not analyse all 'capsule' reviews of fiction, which tend to be 300-500 words long; my method of analysis requires each review to have at least four paragraphs, so capsule reviews that were three paragraphs or less had to be excluded. The final sample comprised 56 feature reviews and 22 capsule reviews.

To determine whether or not these 78 *ABR* reviews were compliment sandwiches, I had to assess where negative and positive comments appeared within the reviews. Determining this orientation—known as

'polarity' within the field of sentiment analysis—presents intractable problems because it is inherently subjective. Analyses of polarity vary significantly between readers, and this variation has led to the rise of computational sentiment analysis or opinion mining, which makes use of software to determine polarity. Digital sentiment analysis, which examines responses from relatively short and simple texts (such as social media posts or customer-generated product reviews), can be useful for analysing certain kinds of cultural responses, as Beth Driscoll has recently demonstrated in her analysis of tweets about and survey responses to the Melbourne Writers Festival (Driscoll).

But Driscoll's method, which employs the program SentiStrength, cannot easily be applied to book reviews. SentiStrength analyses polarity based on the most positive or negative words in a passage, and longer texts therefore distort its results. SentiStrength functions by evaluating texts against an internal bank of words with pre-determined polarity scores; complex rhetorical works, such as book reviews, express polarity in ways that do not correspond to SentiStrength's word bank. Alison Broinowski's review of Dominique Wilson's *The Yellow Papers*, includes the statement 'I cavil at half a dozen typos' (45). This is unambiguously negative, but SentiStrength does not recognise 'cavil' as such. In the same review, Broinowski notes the novel depicts 'racial prejudice' (45), but SentiStrength assesses this as negative. Computational sentiment analysis—at least the kind enabled by off-the-shelf software tools—does not yet present an adequate means for determining polarity of book reviews.

I have instead applied a 'manual' analysis of polarity, following a method partially derived from appraisal theory in corpus linguistics as articulated by Martin and White's *The Language of Evaluation: Appraisal in English* (2005). In Martin and White's taxonomy, book reviewers' evaluations constitute 'appreciation', which refers to 'evaluations of "things"' (56); 'judgment' applies to persons and actions that are oriented towards the social (52). For Martin and White, appreciation can be subdivided into three categories: "reactions" to things (do they catch our attention; do they please us?), their "composition" (balance and complexity), and their "value" (how innovative, authentic, timely, etc.)' (56). There are valid objections to these categories: compositional notions of balance and complexity seem culturally specific value judgments in their own right. Nonetheless, Martin and White's typology reflects the insights common to book reviews and mirrors Haigh's claims that book reviews should be 'engaging' (10), examine what 'makes good books good' (11), and present context that 'deepens understanding and clarifies debate' (11).

Martin and White also usefully discuss the inherent subjectivity of manual appraisal analyses: such analyses are 'inevitably interested' and 'can never be the final word' (206), but, rather than being an unfortunate artifact of examining polarity, this is its natural result. Appraisal is subjective by

nature, and can only be grasped *subjectively*. Nonetheless, attempting to gain more objective purchase on appraisal through analytical methods brings to light trends that otherwise might be obscured. This point recalls John Frow's argument about sociological readings of texts, which are never objective, but provide an essential vantage point that undermines 'the apparent coherence of the literary' by revealing its embedment within determining and contingent social and cultural structures (Frow 242).

Martin and White's appraisal theory establishes some guidelines for analysing polarity, but manual methods for marking appraisal are still in flux. This is due to the novelty of appraisal theory, and the fact that much work in the field has focused on digital sentiment analysis. My method applies aspects of appraisal theory, but greatly simplifies manual analysis to focus on evaluative statements at the levels of the sentence and the paragraph. This approach would be too simplistic for corpus linguistics scholars, but I would argue it is sufficient to establish polarity in *ABR* reviews.

My method is as follows. Rather than analysing entire reviews, I examined the polarity of opening, median, penultimate, and final paragraphs of reviews, which reflect the key structural points of the compliment sandwich. Where there were two median paragraphs (because a review had an even number of paragraphs), I examined the first of them. This method requires reviews to be four paragraphs long, so shorter reviews were excluded.

This method constitutes a mode of 'distant reading', a term Franco Moretti has defined as '*a condition of knowledge*' that 'allows you to focus on units that are much smaller or much larger than the text: devices, themes, tropes—or genres and systems' ('Conjectures', 57). By examining only sections of the text, this approach participates in modes of literary analysis that suspend the usual relationship between part and whole, which forms the basis of traditional hermeneutics. Perhaps the most famous such example from Moretti's *Distant Reading* (2013) involves his analysis of changes in literary culture using a database containing only the *titles* of books. As Caroline Levine has pointed out, the privileging of wholeness in hermeneutics itself relies on a set of assumptions that cannot be separated from contingent political, social, and cultural circumstances (Levine 24-5).

Nonetheless, I have also read each review in its totality, and my belief is that the given selection of paragraphs generally represents the distribution of evaluation in *ABR* reviews. If this had not been the case, reviews' polarity should not correlate to the compliment sandwich form. There is a formal objection to this method: it may be that reviews of this length (between 300-1500 words) naturally follow a pattern that moves from summary to close analysis and ends with evaluation, which lends itself to the

compliment sandwich. Further research would be needed to determine whether this is a generic commonplace of most reviewing.

My polarity analysis employed two different levels of what corpus linguists call 'unitisation' (i.e., the granular level at which polarity is assessed); I assessed polarity at the level of each sentence, and then averaged the results to determine the overall polarity of the paragraph. There were four possible assessments of polarity: units assessed as 'negative' received a score of 0.0; units assessed as 'positive' received a score of 1.0; units assessed as 'mixed' received a score of 0.5; units with no polarity (i.e., sentences that contained only summary, non-evaluative analysis, and neutral statements of fact) were excluded from averages.

So, if a paragraph contained six sentences, three of which were neutral (excluded), one of which was negative (a score of 0.0), one of which was mixed (a score of 0.5) and one of which was positive (a score of 1.0), the polarity average would be calculated by dividing the total score (1.5) by the total number of evaluative sentences (3). Following this method, this paragraph would receive a score of 0.5, which would suggest that it was mixed. This method might overstate the polarity of some paragraphs; if a paragraph contained five sentences, four of which were non-evaluative and one of which was negative (0.0), then the entire paragraph score would be 0.0. I would argue, however, that evaluative sentences following neutral analysis or description often determine the tone of paragraphs.

I will briefly outline the criteria I used to assess polarity. Assessments of polarity are affected by subjective perception and background knowledge: a reader familiar with book reviews' evaluative lexicon will probably be more sensitive to such judgments. Despite the subjectivity of such assessments, I was surprised that most evaluations of polarity seem straightforward. Positive evaluations often employ explicit modifiers. For example, Catriona Menzies-Pike's 2015 review of Lisa Gorton's *The Life of Houses* states that the novel 'is a nuanced and intelligent reflection on the spaces mothers and daughters share' (19). Amy Ballieu's 2015 review of James Bradley's *Clade* notes that he 'elegantly evokes the subtleties of his characters' evolving relationships' (36). Felicity Plunket's 2015 review of Amanda Lohrey's *A Short History of Richard Kline* notes that Lohrey's 'perceptive analysis irradiates each of the novel's questions' (37). Chris Flynn's 2015 review of Steve Toltz's *Quicksand* praises not only the novel under considerations but also three other novels *and* the publishing house that produced them:

Penguin Australia's recent fiction output has been remarkable. Ceridwen Dovey's *Only the Animals*, Omar Musa's *Here Come the Dogs*, and James Bradley's *Clade* have all been idiosyncratic and inventive reads, bristling with energy and ideas. Steve Toltz's *Quicksand* proves to be the cherry on

the cake—a beguiling novel that confounds and astonishes in equal measure, often on the same page. (30)

The rampant praise here is so expansive that a cynical reader might be forgiven for wondering if Flynn—himself a novelist—is hoping to sign a contract with Penguin Random House in the future. In each case, though, modifying adjectives—‘nuanced’, ‘intelligent’, ‘perceptive’, ‘idiosyncratic’, ‘interesting’, ‘beguiling’, ‘bristling’—indicate a positive polarity.

I deemed as ‘mixed’ those evaluations in which criticisms were both advanced and ameliorated. For example, in his 2014 review of Rohan Wilson’s *To Name Those Lost*, David Whish-Wilson both questions and praises the dark tone of the novel:

Wilson’s vision of Launceston town is hellish, and some readers will question the relentlessness of his vision, his refusal to heighten the dark with contrasting moments of light (one episode in which children torture a cat felt like overkill), but this is not to detract from the novel’s vitality or its perfectly rendered dialogue. (55)

Here, the novel’s ‘relentlessness’ is queried with the suggestion that the novel may be too dark, but this criticism is paired with mitigating praise about the work’s ‘vitality’ and ‘perfectly rendered dialogue’; Whish-Wilson also suggests this criticism is a matter of personal disposition rather than a technical failing (although attributing this perspective to ‘some readers’ could also pass off a subjective critique as a more objective one). In a 2015 review of Anson Cameron’s *The Last Pulse*, Catriona Menzies-Pike similarly notes, regarding the novel’s objectivising portrayal of women, that ‘In a gleeful and inclusive romp, this strikes a dud note’ (32). While the comment is critical, it is alleviated by praise and cannot be considered wholly negative.

The distinction between ‘mixed’ and ‘negative’ assessments seems more subject to variation across readers. Some negative assessments are clear, as in the case of Rachel Robertson’s 2014 review of *Riding A Crocodile: A Physician’s Tale* by Paul Komesaroff when she notes that ‘Like the characters, the dialogue can be stilted and unconvincing, all too obviously serving the novel’s themes’ (32). Such wholly negative assertions are relatively uncommon in the sample of *ABR* reviews I analysed; the rarity of unqualified criticism goes some way to substantiating the claim that *ABR* reviews are nice, or at least aim to be *civil*.

Many of the criticisms I judged as negative were still hedged, as in Sarah Holland-Batt’s review of *When the Night Comes* by Favel Parrett, which notes that ‘While the novel integrates its two halves evenly, they do not always feel equally balanced or pressing’ (12). Here the criticism—that novel’s two halves lack equal weight—is mitigated by the claim they are ‘integrated’—a fairly opaque distinction. The hedging of negative judgments

may simply mean book reviewers finely calibrate their judgments to be sensitive to a novel's form and the author's apparent intentions. Nonetheless, Holland-Batt's critique here differs in intensity from 'mixed' evaluations because it does not counterpoise its criticism with strongly positive language.

Another source of potential variation requires consideration: several prominent critics studiously avoid the modifiers that typically signify evaluation. Such sentences, if not read carefully, can be incorrectly deemed 'non-evaluative'. James Ley—recipient of the Pascall Prize and founding editor of the *Sydney Review of Books*—claims that 'Whenever I write a sentence that sounds like the kind of thing that gets plastered across a book cover, I cross it out' (Ley 29). Kerry Goldsworthy, winner of Pascall Prize and one of Australia's most eminent critics, has also noted an aversion to overtly evaluative language:

I try to avoid direct expressions of evaluation—except in extreme cases, I don't think the worth of a book can be confidently quantified—and, as a result, can sometimes find that I haven't made my judgement as clearly as readers might have liked; I prefer to make more indirect comment on the book's value by using descriptive terms with positive or negative connotations. ('Everyone's a Critic' 22)

Goldsworthy's 2014 review of Joan London's *The Golden Age* demonstrates this precept when she states that 'The curse of the Old World is invoked in flashbacks; although the word "Jewish" appears in this book only once... a handful of scenes from wartime Europe tell us all we need to know in this respect' (11). The praise is implicit: London's novel is understated and alludes indirectly to larger issues, such as anti-Semitism, which demonstrates her technical mastery. Goldsworthy's observations positively reflect London's craft and restraint without evaluative adjectives.

3.The Dominance of the Compliment Sandwich

My expectation was that *ABR* reviews would not overwhelmingly conform to the compliment sandwich, but a significant proportion were 'compliment sandwiches' in my analysis. This finding becomes more significant when considering some other trends revealed in the analysis. For one, overwhelmingly positive reviews make up a large portion of the sample: 31 of 78 reviews (39.7%) did not contain any significant negative criticism in sampled paragraphs. The high prevalence of positive reviews to some degree substantiates the idea that *ABR* reviewing is often 'nice'. Moreover, only two of the wholly positive reviews were compliment sandwiches—which is logical since a wholly positive review would normally not have any criticism requiring mitigation.

This high proportion of positive reviews was not balanced out by an equal number of harshly critical reviews. There are only seven reviews (08.9%) that could be viewed as significantly negative (having an overall evaluation score of 0.25 or lower). But there was a significant differential in the percentage of negative reviews in relation to form: while 4 of the 22 (18.2%) of capsule reviews were negative, only 3 of the 56 (05.3%) feature reviews were negative. I will consider the significance of this difference later in the essay.

Of the three negative feature reviews, Alison Broinowski's review of *The Yellow Papers* by Dominique Wilson seems the most critical, raising significant concerns with little compensatory praise. Delia Falconer's review of Mark Henshaw's *The Snow Kimono* offered some significant critiques of the novel, which I will discuss at the end of this essay. Susan Lever's 2015 review of *Merciless Gods* by Christos Tsiolkas, though it praises the author's adherence to naturalism as 'admirable', ultimately concludes that 'it makes for a severely confined literary art' (23). Such reviews are outliers, however, since 71 of the 78 reviews are mixed or positive; my analysis thus applies within a context of reviewing practices that are often positive but rarely negative.

Another key finding—which differs from the model of the compliment sandwich that Etherington describes—is that evaluations almost always occur at the end of reviews, but are less frequent in early paragraphs. Only 34 of the opening paragraphs (43.5%) from my sample contained any evaluations, which is logical, given that opening paragraphs often provide summary information. Only 7 of these 34 reviews (08.9%) had mixed or negative evaluations in the first paragraph, while 27 of the 34 (79.4%) first paragraphs with evaluations were positive. Of the median paragraphs, 46 (58.9%) contained evaluative language; again, many of the reviews seem to engage in thematic or formal analysis at this stage, but refrain from evaluation. By contrast, 55 of the penultimate paragraphs (70.5%) contained explicit evaluations (and 7 of the 13 (53.8%) reviews whose penultimate paragraphs were non-evaluative were wholly positive). Seventy-three of the 78 reviews (93.5%) contained evaluations in the final paragraph. Only four (05.1%) of these final paragraphs had a negative polarity overall. Again, this suggests that *ABR* reviews tend to privilege a civil criticism that refrains from ending reviews on a negative note.

The inconsistent appearance of evaluation in early paragraphs means that—while I could not locate the form of the compliment sandwich Etherington describes—I could identify another form of what might be called the 'open-face' compliment sandwich ('OFCS'). The OFCS leads with summary and formal analysis that has no evaluative polarity. It deploys negative or mixed criticism in the penultimate paragraph, which is qualified and alleviated in the final paragraph. Such reviews are not necessarily wholly positive in the final paragraph, but rather the polarity of final paragraph is higher than in

the penultimate paragraph. Of the 78 reviews I examined, 35 (44.8%) conformed to the OFCS.

The OFCS is even more predominant than this suggests, because wholly positive reviews generally do not employ this form. Of the 47 reviews that were not wholly positive, 33 (70.2%) met the criteria of the OFCS. Moreover, only two of the seven negative reviews adhered to the OFCS. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the OFCS is most common among mixed reviews, comprising 31 of the 40 (77.5%) mixed reviews. Regardless, it is clear the wholly positive review and the OFCS are the most common mode of *ABR* reviewing in my sample, since 64 of the 78 reviews (82.1%) belonged to one or both of these categories.

In this sense, then, my survey of *ABR* fiction reviews between September 2014 and August 2015 suggests that the OFCS is both a major form and the *dominant form* among reviews that are not wholly positive. The survey also suggests that such reviews, on balance, tend to follow a rough formal pattern: they open with summary information about the author or work, offer detailed non-evaluative analysis of the text in the middle of the review, present their most stringent critiques in the penultimate paragraph, and then qualify or soften such criticisms in the final paragraph. I now want to examine the consequences of these findings by considering their significance, offering some possible explanations, and returning to the question of whether or not *ABR* reviews are 'too nice'.

4. Do Open-Faced Compliment Sandwiches Matter?

My survey does suggest that the OFCS is prominent in *ABR* fiction reviews, and, following the claims applied by Etherington in 'The Poet Tasters', this would suggest that *ABR* reviews are 'too nice'. Its 'niceness' is further underscored by the prominence of overwhelmingly positive reviews, and the relative paucity of negative reviews. If one believes that reviewing should be relentlessly critical and strongly negative where appropriate, then *ABR* appears to fail this test. What I want to examine now is how such criticism is motivated by what Pierre Bourdieu might describe as the field-position of different agents. In particular, I will make two claims: 1) attacks on overly nice reviews tend to ignore the commercial function of book reviewing, which cannot be easily separated from its critical task, and 2) the niceness (or not) of reviewing seems to be at least partially tied to the field-position of agents and organisations in important, and arguably determining, ways.

Etherington's critique of too-nice reviewing seems motivated by the idea that it undermines genuine criticism. In 'The Poet Tasters' he suggests that the compliment sandwich blunts critical praxis. In 'The Brain Feign' he

argues that cordial reviewing practices do not apply adequate scrutiny and generate illegitimate praise that can harden into received opinion: 'Critical acclaim compels us to entertain the idea that this novel's distinction should be regarded universally to be true' (2013). Etherington elaborates on these claims in a comment left on an *Overland* essay also about reviewing practices, arguing that:

I think decline polemics arise out of a keen and justifiable sense of despair—that so many of the public performances of artistic experience (aka 'criticism') fail to articulate well the truth of those experiences; and nearly always under the predictable pressures of the distribution of real and symbolic capital. (Brooker 2014)

Here, his frustration—presented in explicitly Bourdieusian terms—is directed towards criticism that reflects the social prestige of an author or publishing house, rather than applying a rigorous analysis outside of the commercial and symbolic valuations of the publishing industry. Etherington worries that reviewing practices might be informed by the commercial imperatives of the book trade rather than a disinterested or at least distanced application of critical rigor.

James Ley makes a similar point in *ABR*'s own 'Critic of the Month' column from 2014 by arguing that 'so much alleged "reviewing" is transparently chicken-hearted and insipid' (37). But he diverges from Etherington in arguing that 'niceness' is not an adequate metric since it reflects the 'misperception... that the salient aspect of a review is the critic's final verdict' (37). As Ley argues, this undue emphasis on evaluation obscures the fact that the 'quality of analysis is always more important than one's personal impressions.... The primary concern of criticism is the meaning of the work, so whatever evaluations might follow are secondary concerns' (37).

Presumably, the pernicious reviews Ley refers to are both overly evaluative and reflect commercial imperatives. Ley's suggestion for combatting 'chicken-hearted' reviewing is not through Kantian disinterest, but the formation of strong critical dispositions: 'a critic needs to have some kind of traction, some point of view. A perfectly even-handed critic would resemble the proverbial liberal who refuses to take his own side in an argument' (37). Ley's arguments indicate a larger structural critique: the need for critics with 'traction' presupposes the existence of a cultural and commercial structure that will foster the growth of what I will describe as 'strong' critics—a term that is not meant as a form of subjective praise, but rather an objective description of position characteristics.

I am sympathetic to Etherington's and Ley's concerns, and have myself written an essay ('In the Same Boat', 2013) in *The Sydney Review of Books*, which articulated similar concerns about reviewing practices. [3] It

needs to be noted that my analysis of *ABR* reviews potentially substantiates aspects of their claims. It is notable, for example, that, as I mentioned earlier, 18.1% of capsule reviews are negative, while only 5.3% of feature reviews are. Moreover, 41.1% of feature reviews were wholly positive, while only 31.8% of capsule reviews are. This distinction matters, because capsule reviews are much more likely to examine works by debut or lesser-known writers than feature reviews. Indeed, of the three negative feature reviews, one examines a debut work (Dominique Wilson's *The Yellow Papers*). The difference in polarity between capsule and feature reviews suggests that the symbolical capital possessed by established authors might affect reviewers to some degree; when taken in aggregate, reviews of works by more established writers, which appear in feature reviews, are more likely to be overwhelmingly positive and less likely to be overwhelmingly negative. At the same time, it could be argued that more established authors are simply more likely to produce works of high quality and less likely to produce bad works.

So, while there may be merit to Etherington's and Ley's claims that social and economic capital affect reviewing, their claims largely ignore the fact that book reviews are inextricably tied to the book's status as a commodity—as evidenced by the fact that virtually all book reviews cover new releases. Book reviews straddle a divide between economic and 'literary' notions of value, a distinction already made ambiguous given that published works of literature are always already commodities. Book reviews may contain incisive analysis—it may appear as if they *only* contain such analysis—but reviews are absolutely a form of indirect marketing presented as a specialised kind of informed consumer recommendation.

Ley's claim that reviewing is not primarily evaluative runs counter to the commercial conditions that underwrite virtually all forms of book reviewing. Books reviews are a hybrid genre, combining literary criticism, advertising and news reporting (since the publication of a book is a newsworthy 'event'); this hybridity produces a schizoid split because the genre has its feet planted in two irreconcilable notions of value (the economic and the literary). Ongoing debates about reviewing practices derive from this internal contradiction, which explains why such debates serve as a proxy for questions about the difference between commercial and literary regimes of value. From this perspective, reviewing practices, because they are enmeshed in the commerce of the book trade, inevitably reflect economic and symbolic capital. The campaign against 'niceness' in reviewing often does not adequately grasp the intractability of this situation.

Moreover, attacks on 'nice' reviews have not always adequately grappled with how such views derive from positions in the literary field. As I noted at the beginning of this article, attacks on literary niceness by Haigh and Etherington have been used to create controversy and discussion around the launch of new literary journals (*Kill Your Darlings* and *The Sydney*

Review of Books). More recently, *The Saturday Paper* attracted attention for its book reviews by instituting a policy that its reviewers remain anonymous. These provocations suggest that existing publications—such as *ABR*—are staid and ‘too nice’, whereas the new publications will offer different and more objective forms of criticism. In other words, the argument against niceness enables new entrants to the field of literary journals to justify their existence and differentiate themselves in a crowded market. Attacks on niceness reflect the position characteristics of upstart journals seeking to challenge the legitimacy of powerful agents or organisations that determine the structure of the field.

A journal like *ABR* seems to have little to gain from publishing overly critical reviews. It is already established as a prominent outlet for literary reviewing, has an active subscriber base, various forms of institutional support and recognition, and attracts significant private donations. This last fact suggests that many *ABR* subscribers and stakeholders have attachments—whether formal, informal, or emotional—to established literary institutions. Given this, why would *ABR* disrupt the circuits of reviewing that underwrite its influence? I also suspect that *ABR*’s generally civil reviewing practices reflect the expectations of its audience (both subscribers and donors), who want informed cultural recommendations and restrained analysis, rather than literary provocations. In other words, the ‘niceness’ of *ABR* reviews probably cannot be separated from the position the journal occupies in the field and the concomitant expectations of its readers and stakeholders.

It is also interesting to note that many of the most vocal critics of ‘nice’ reviewing have positions that are related to, but not directly involved with, the book trade. Etherington is an academic. Haigh is known primarily as a sports writer. I am an academic, and James Ley, although he is an active freelance book-reviewer, has a PhD and has written an academic monograph on literary book reviewing (*The Critic and the Modern World*, 2014). On the one hand, this outsider status enables the capacity to look at the functioning of literary symbolic capital without economic self-interest. On the other hand, the ‘outsider’ status of such critics means they are not subject to the same penalties for violating the rules of the game as those directly engaged with literary commerce. In this sense, outsiders’ criticism of ‘insiders’ ignores the precarious nature of making a living through the publishing industry.

Professional reviewers similarly experience economic precariousness: very few people in Australia can make a living from book reviewing, because the work is typically undertaken on a freelance basis (which is always feast or famine) and there is a paucity of outlets for reviews. As a result, few book reviewers have the economic liberty to cast aside or ignore the conventions of book reviewing, which probably often do encourage civility (or niceness)

and discourage overly critical reviews, at least in the case of well-known authors.

There are, however, some exceptions to this tendency. These exceptions are critics who write for publications like *ABR* but are still able to offer negative assessments even of works that have been highly regarded. I term these individuals 'strong critics', both because of their capacity to express negative evaluations outside of the accepted OFCS form and because this capacity is backed by a store of symbolic capital. From this perspective, stringent reviewing would not simply reflect the strength of personal convictions, but rather an agent's position in the field, which enables him or her to make such claims without fear of reprisal, losing face, undermining relationships, or simply being ignored. In this sense, being a 'strong critic' still requires one to 'play the game' within the literary field, since the reviewer in question needs to be esteemed (i.e., to have an adequate amount of symbolic capital) and to publish in an outlet or journal that will be sufficiently read (either by other cultural producers or by the broader public, or by both) to have an impact on the field.

One potential example of strong criticism in the sample I analysed comes from Delia Falconer's review of Mark Henshaw's *The Snow Kimono* (2014), which was generally well-reviewed and won the Christina Stead Prize for Fiction in the NSW Premier's Literary Awards. Despite such accolades, Falconer highlights a variety of problems in the book with analytical rigor, by noting both its intellectual aims, and simultaneously describing the problematic results of the novel's employment of 'an oddly affectless, flat prose':

The effect is like watching the kind of arthouse film in which everything receives lingering attention from the camera—the rain on a window pane, light on a flagstone park—and especially women's sufferings, as a highly aestheticized element of the *mise en scene*. (10)

Here, these reservations, along with questions about the novel's sexual politics are raised in the review's final paragraph, and the criticism builds towards the final sentence which offers a clearly negative evaluation: 'I finished *The Snow Kimono* with a queasy sense of discomfort, and not, I sense, of the sort intended' (10). Nonetheless, it is worth noting that even this strong opinion is articulated in a highly-personalised and hedged (e.g., 'I sense') mode that employs affect as a strategy for softening stringent criticism. Thus, even moments of 'strong' criticism—which make critical assertions about books against the grain of broader reception—still employ hedges. Perhaps, then, the debates about the 'niceness' of literary reviewing are about field position in the sense that they raise the question of who is allowed to offer strong critiques of novels and under what circumstances.

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Notes

[1] The nature of the Australian literary field remains contested. David Carter argues that the Australian literary field increasingly resembles 'media cultures', such as 'cinema, television and popular music' rather than Bourdieu's oppositional model of high and low cultures (Carter 141). Beth Driscoll claims that literary discourse is generated by a middlebrow circuit of production and reception that sits between the notions of avant-garde and popular fiction. I have argued that the Australian literary field comprises a set of producer-consumers who are both audience and participants (Stinson 36-7), a mode of cultural praxis Bourdieu identified with the avant-garde. At the moment, however, I am applying this term in Bourdieu's sense to refer to the 'space of literary or artistic position-takings' that comprises 'the structured set of the manifestations of social agents' in relation to writing and literary culture (Bourdieu 30).

[2] Ken Gelder, in *Popular Fiction* (2004), has argued that popular fiction might be viewed as the 'opposite of Literature' (11). While it's worth noting the differences between these fields, I have not made distinctions between popular and literary works for the purposes of my survey. Indeed, many reviewed works seem to be popular fiction, but the *Australian Book Review* mostly reviews what appear to be literary titles.

[3] It's worth emphasising that the criticisms of reviewing offered by Etherington, me and others are hardly objective or disinterested. *The Sydney Review of Books* was founded at Western Sydney University, and runs out of the same offices as Giramondo publishing; both arguably reflect a set of highbrow literary practices and preferences.

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True or False? The Role of Ethics in Book Reviewing

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Can, or should, literary criticism ever be entirely free of ethical judgement? And what does it mean to talk about the place of ethics in criticism? As a literary scholar with an interest in a wide range of fiction in English, and a book reviewer, I am implicitly confronted with these questions whenever I set out to write about literature in either essay or review form. Although the book review and the literary essay are different types of endeavour in many ways, this problem is common to both.

The compass of the ethical is, of course, broad, but the kind of questions I have in mind include whether the critic believes that an author has a duty to express or imply a particular set of social or political beliefs, or even that an author must not do so. They can especially bedevil criticism of historical works. Is it legitimate to criticise Jane Austen for failing to write more about the slaves in the West Indies upon whom the comfortable existence of the Bertram family in *Mansfield Park* depends? If Charles Dickens was sexist, should we excuse him because of the prevailing attitudes of his time? A whole critical tradition of reassessing classics of literature has examined these questions and it can be enlightening if it is done with subtlety and sensitivity to the prevailing morality at the time the works were written: judging literary works out of their historical context can never be either useful or fair.

Beyond the ethical interpretations of what novels are *about*, there is a body of literary and philosophical scholarship which proposes that the act of reading is in itself a means of moral improvement. Wayne Booth, in *The Company We Keep*, proposes that reading makes us better people by promoting empathy with literary characters. Further, he asks himself the very question with which I began this essay, and responds in the affirmative:

even those critics who work hard to purge themselves of all but the most abstract formal interest turn out to have an ethical program in mind—a belief that a given way of reading, or a given kind of genuine literature, is what will do us most good. (5)

Simon Stow, writing about the heated 'ethical criticism debate' between Booth, Richard Posner and Martha Nussbaum, remarks that 'there is something irresistibly appealing about having something as pleasurable as reading also be *good for us* as well' (194). What he believes these writers all ignore, however, is the extent to which their unstated and perhaps unacknowledged political beliefs colour their attitudes to the question of how, and how far, ethics should affect literary criticism. This is a question that should give any thoughtful cultural critic pause. Stanley Cavell writes, 'The problem of the critic, as of the artist, is not to discount his (*sic*) subjectivity, but to include it; not to overcome it in agreement, but to master it in exemplary ways' (94). Quite what it means to master one's subjectivity 'in exemplary ways' is something I will attempt to untangle.

There is, in a sense, more at stake when one's subject is a recent book by a contemporary writer. Authors are likely to read and react to the reviews which come out in newspapers and magazines following publication of their work. Critics may, therefore, have a direct influence, for good or ill, on an author's work and indeed their morale. For this reason, I will restrict my remarks in this essay to the specific context of reviews published in edited periodicals, either newspapers, magazines or scholarly journals, in response to the publication of a book, rather than scholarly literary criticism in peer-reviewed articles or monographs on the one hand, or crowd-sourced commentary on sites like Goodreads on the other hand. I don't intend to discuss 'external' questions, like whether you should review a friend's book, or whether you should be influenced by an author's reputation. I am interested in the judgements a reviewer makes about a book, and whether those judgements can ever be free of any ethical stance.

The definition of 'ethics' I want to rely on is simply that in the *Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary*: 'moral principles; rules of conduct', where 'moral' means 'concerned with accepted rules and standards of human behaviour'. In this context, I am interested in the ethical standards that a reviewer, explicitly or implicitly, uses to judge a book and its author. Basically, I am referring to the question of the reviewer's idea of what a literary work should do, rather than what it should be.

I have been in the reviewing game now for about 15 years. There have been stretches of weeks or months over the past decade when I rarely had fewer than five books on my reviewing pile, with each deadline springing up to replace the last with a regularity that I remember finding reassuring. I have also been a book reviews editor for two very different periodicals—a locally-published monthly magazine and an academic literary journal. I relished the challenge of finding a good match between book and reviewer, and bore the drudgery of copy-editing without too much complaint. I don't enjoy conflict, so the inevitable stoushes made me want to crawl into a hole and hide, but I have usually done what I could to defend the reviewer against the angry author, and taken it on the chin if it was genuine editorial

misjudgement. But I rarely feel the need to apologise to an author for a review I have written or published, even though reviews can fracture friendships and sever collegial bonds.

While I have written hundreds of reviews and edited more, and have conducted classes on review-writing, I haven't spent much time theorising about book reviews, much less formulating lists of rules. I've reviewed a range of general non-fiction, but mostly I've covered fiction and creative non-fiction, and it is these reviews that concern me here.

The best reviews of creative writing speak to me personally. They follow no predictable formula. In defiance of the various rule-makers—and lists of rules are easily found on the Internet—as both reader and editor I don't care whether they discuss the epigraph, the title, the author's previous work, the voicing, the technique, the editing, or any other specific aspect of a book. They can include some plot summary, as long as it serves the needs of the review; and this may be controversial, but I can't see why disclosing the ending of a novel is so frowned-upon.

What I do care about is whether reviewers express their opinions about the book and give some idea why they think as they do. Kerry Goldsworthy, in her blog *Still Life with Cat*, rather than formulating a list of rules, sets out a list of people to whom the reviewer has a responsibility. She prefaces it by saying 'It was a list whose length surprised even me': it includes the review's readers, the book's potential readers, the author of the book, the editor and the publication who have requested the review, literary culture in general, and yourself. Some of these responsibilities are concerned with conducting oneself professionally, but under 'the writer(s) or editor(s) of the book in question', she includes, 'to read the book carefully and comment on it thoughtfully; ... not to misrepresent it, and ... not to say anything that will actually make them want to slash their wrists'. To yourself, she writes, you have a responsibility 'to refuse to say anything you don't mean'. In a book review, in contrast to academic literary criticism, 'saying what you mean' involves providing an explicit evaluation of the work. Without evaluation, a review is either pure description or waffle and is of little use or interest to readers.

To make an evaluation which, however subjective it may be, is still fair, it is essential to let the book approach you as much on its own terms as possible, giving it time to open itself up to you before deciding what you think. Delaying the decision ('decide' comes from Latin *de* + *caedere* = 'to cut off') is vital if you are going to write a fair review. Deciding *what* you think comes first for me, before deciding *why* you think it. And that doesn't work if you have a checklist of explicit criteria to measure the work against. Nevertheless, a review is in important ways a judgement of value and therefore the critic must have a set of standards, however inchoate and unacknowledged.

Many of these standards are—or at least appear to be—in the realm of aesthetics rather than ethics: questions of structure, plotting, narrative pacing and so on. Characterisation might seem a purely aesthetic issue as well, but this is where ethics begins to show. It can be a matter of how authors ‘treat’ their characters: whether they invent ‘dispensable’ people—particularly common in crime fiction—whether they include or exclude minority groups, or treat them with respect. The question of the author’s relation to their material is also important, particularly when the work is in the form of memoir.

As I have noted, there is much advice available for would-be reviewers. Scanning the Internet offerings on ‘how to write a book review’, perhaps the most immediately appealing advice I found was, ‘Review the book you read—not the book you wish the author had written’ (Asenjo). But like many seemingly common-sense statements, on further thought this injunction might have little practical meaning. One could certainly take the author’s intentions into account (*pace* Wimsatt and Beardsley^[1]) if they are obvious or easily discoverable, but one might still legitimately deplore the nature of the book the author has chosen to write, and express a wish they had used their talents in another way.

An obvious example of the imposition of a critic’s moral view on the whole conception of a novel is a review of Amy T. Matthews’ *End of the Night Girl* (2011). Matthew’s novel has a double narrative in which a present-day Adelaide waiter, Molly, is obsessed by an account which she is herself writing of a young Polish victim of the Holocaust. It is a novel of great subtlety and moral complexity, and, in Matthews’ own words, ‘is in essence ... a novel about the ethics of fictionalising the Holocaust’ (Dooley, ‘Walking’). This is difficult and contested territory, as Matthews is well aware, and to some degree, critical misgivings might be anticipated. Esther Marion points out that ‘writing on the Nazi genocide has been marked by the tension between rupture and continuity’, and there is certainly an acknowledgement of this tension in Matthews’ novel. I was therefore taken aback by what Christopher Bantick wrote in the *Australian*: ‘this is a bold novel, yet I can’t help thinking Matthews should have written a stand-alone story about the Holocaust and not attempted to splice the contemporary with the historical. *Gienia’s story matters; Molly’s does not*’ (22, emphasis added). Until the last sentence this could have been a criticism of a risky undertaking which failed for aesthetic or technical reasons. But to explicitly discount the value of one woman’s life like this is questionable, especially when the novel is itself a struggle with the ethics of writing about great suffering from a position of safety and privilege.

But am I immune to making similarly questionable ethical judgements? In 2012, I reviewed the thriller *Thirst* by L.A. Larkin, set in Antarctica. This book conformed to every stereotype of the genre—in fact I based my review on these stereotypes:

The story proceeds from predicament to predicament, clichés mounting till they threaten to bury us in an avalanche. The dialogue is stilted, the heroics are overdone, the environmental preaching heavy-handed.

My impatience with the thriller genre is palpable in my review. A book like this is, clearly, written to very specific formula and aims only for light entertainment. However, there was more to my objection than irritation with generic conventions:

For me, the biggest surprise about this book came at the very end, when I read the author's bio and found that the writer (with a carefully non-gender-specific name) is actually female. I suppose one could read a small victory for feminism into a woman making inroads into a male-dominated genre, but even that is undercut by the confirmation of gender stereotypes at every turn. OK, Maddie is tough, but she has to depend on Luke to save her life. Of course, one could argue that this is a thriller, not a tract. But there is explicit moralising throughout, and it is a little disappointing that in Larkin's imagination we still need a maladjusted six foot three male to save the world.

My criticism here could be boiled down to my exasperation with a female author colluding in the sexism of the thriller genre. If the book had been written by a male author, my review would still have expressed impatience with the stereotypes and the tedious predictability of the sensational plot. The sex of the author added indignation to my assessment. In principle perhaps it shouldn't matter who the author of a novel is, and my criticism should be gender blind: it is not any particular author's duty to speak on behalf of their own sex, race, nationality, or sexual orientation. In practice, it was just the last straw. Perhaps I should allow for the fact that Bantick's moral objections in his review of Matthews' novel are equally valid, but on reflection, I don't regret the position I took. If the book had any aesthetically redeeming features—if it was well-written, or well-structured—I might have made allowances for the sexism, but even so it seemed outrageous to me that a woman should perpetuate such stereotypes. There is an interaction between aesthetics and morality which is hard to disentangle. I think in this case I failed to master my subjectivity. On the other hand, I also refused to say what I didn't mean: and after giving it some thought I did say what I did mean.

This leads me to some reviews I am a little less comfortable about, though I still stand by them. Early in my reviewing career I reviewed the travel book *Llama for Lunch* by Lydia Laube. I concluded the review,

Llama for Lunch is a work of breathtaking solipsism with few beauties of style or wit to recommend it and I ... feel a little embarrassed that a fellow Australian could expect, apparently with confidence, to entertain us with such facile rubbish.

One of my criticisms is that Laube writes of her travels in South American but reveals very little about herself. I started the second paragraph of my review by asking, 'Who is Lydia Laube?', and ended it by saying, 'I'm sorry if this is a secret which she would prefer wasn't known, but Lydia Laube was born in 1948'. This was information easily obtained from an external source, and I thought it was relevant because I was ready to forgive her some of the immaturity of the book if she had been younger. But again, to what extent is it legitimate to base criticism on a writer's sex, or age, or other personal characteristics? Is it because a travel book in particular seems to require a personal investment, some candour about the author's own life and situation? Unless it's a factual guide book, it's a kind of memoir. If the traveller says nothing about herself, it is hard for her to enlist our interest in her travels, and we are left with poorly contextualised, ill-informed and sometimes insulting trivia. Once again, my ethical criticism is closely linked to aesthetic judgement: the words 'facile' and 'trivia' denote a failure to pay proper attention to the places and people who are the ostensible subjects of the work, and in my judgement, the book just becomes a vehicle for the incurious and vacant gaze of someone we know nothing about.

Another travel book I reviewed was *The Veiled Lands* by Christine Hogan. My review drips with contempt. It is very short—less than 200 words—but I managed to fit in the following sentence:

Ostensibly bent on researching women in Islam, she would ask questions if she happened to run across a female, but usually this flirtatious woman of a certain age was quite happy being squired by the handsome male companions who she lined up to escort her.

Was this unduly harsh, or worse, did it cross the line between legitimate criticism of the work and personal attack? Hogan certainly thought so, and wrote me an indignant email complaining about what I had said. Perhaps my expectations were unreasonable, though in a case like this they are set up by the author in the title and introduction to a book and I think a critic is entitled to complain if they are not fulfilled. However, I think I did go too far here and would not write in that way now. My tone was insulting and ungenerous, and I allowed the author little credit for the aspects of the book which were interesting and worthwhile. Peter Craven believes that one should avoid 'second-guessing of the "I don't like it but you might" kind, which is both factitiously obvious ... and which patronises the reader' (quoted in Goldsworthy). I tend to agree: although this would be a way of signalling to the reader that what you are offering is based on a subjective opinion, it is, or should be, redundant and from a practical point of view, uses up space which one would rarely like to surrender.

In reviewing fiction, there are obvious pitfalls to avoid, such as conflating the narrator and the author and assuming that characters' opinions (even those of sympathetic characters) are shared by the author. Irony can be

notoriously difficult to detect, and expert critics' interpretations can diverge widely. I find it refreshing and sometimes chastening to hear novelists speaking frankly about how they go about writing and where ethics comes in. I interviewed Melbourne novelist Andrea Goldsmith in 2014, and asked her, 'To what extent is your choice of multiple points of view an ethical rather than just a technical one?' Her response was very revealing:

AG: I don't really understand what you mean.

GD: ... it's making sure that you're giving people equal weight, that you're doing justice to everyone.

AG: Oh, no, I'm not worried about that, oh, goodness, no! They work for me, but mostly they work for the novel. ... Everything is in service to the overall coherence of the novel. I don't believe that novels are fair or politically correct and I don't think they ought to be. I've always believed that you can get away with a hell of a lot more in fiction than you ever can in non-fiction. I had a paedophile in *Reunion*, a sympathetic paedophile, and I got away with it. I couldn't have in non-fiction. ... That's what fiction can do—silence as well as challenge the most basic values and attitudes. I love that subversive but very powerful aspect of fiction. (Dooley, "They All Begin" 6-7)

One of my main reasons for establishing the electronic journal *Writers in Conversation* was to publish exactly these types of exchanges—a kind of 'reality check' for literary critics like me who get into the habit of making assumptions about the ethics of fiction. Another forum which I have found particularly enlightening in this respect is novelist Charlotte Wood's *The Writer's Room*, an online subscription series in which Wood speaks candidly and at length with other writers about their craft.^[2] In her interview with Tegan Bennett Daylight, for example, there were many surprising moments, including a discussion of 'killing' characters:

CW: You can get away with a lot if you kill someone. Especially a young person. And it is sort of suspect.

TBD: Yeah, that's right. That's what I mean about people being mesmerised. It's like, 'Oh, my god! He's so sick and he's dying. Chemotherapy!'

CW: I've done that—killed babies, a couple of times. In a horrible way it's a sort of guaranteed crowd-pleaser.

TBD: It's a bit of a cheap trick, isn't it? [laughs] Oh god.

CW: But I think doing that is perhaps a part of learning to write, don't you? Slowly learning to resist the easy manipulation of readers' feelings. (5)

Critics have every right to call out such 'cheap tricks', even if the author intended to use them. Authors use 'tricks' (cheap or not) all the time to influence readers' opinions or, perhaps more to the point, emotions. As critics, we can recognise and even applaud the skill with which they accomplish this without agreeing with them, but at the same time we can criticise the author's implied ethics if they offend us. Sometimes we might misinterpret their intentions, but I take comfort from the fact (or the hope) that I am not the only reviewer of any particular book. And authors are also learning their limits as they write, as Wood and Daylight show in their discussion above. Christos Tsiolkas, who was interviewed by Wood in the December 2015 number of *The Writer's Room*, found the experience of writing his third novel, *Dead Europe*, 'completely frightening':

Frightening because when you unleash certain thoughts, they feel like you can't control them. That is the book where I learned that there are certain limits to what you should unleash. ... There may be readers who think I didn't make the right ethical choice, that I went too far, but I did actually learn the limit. And learned that there is a moral and right reason to set limits in what you do with writing a book. (7)

In this case, Tsiolkas is concerned with the danger a certain kind of writing can pose not just to readers but to writers themselves. Other writers are less concerned about the effect their writing has on their audience. Tabish Khair, interviewed in 2015, said, 'I think a creative writer should write as well as he can, and then let other people decide whether his work is relevant or not, preferably ten years after his death'. (Chaubey)

A more recognisable problem, and one that writers often mention, is the literal or naïve reading. Bennett Daylight told Wood,

when *Bombora* was published, a couple of people said to me, in a worried sort of way, 'It's not very feminist, is it?' I was stunned. I mean, *I'm* a feminist but life is complicated, people don't always behave in a feminist way, or if they do, then that's another story of darkness and weirdness and all that kind of stuff. (7)

Similarly, J.M. Coetzee received a letter from a reader complaining that he had included 'an anti-Semitic remark' in *Slow Man* (Auster and Coetzee 96). The remark was uttered by one of his characters and it would be a very naïve reader who would conflate the opinions of this particular author and character pair. However, in this case the reader was making a slightly different point: 'Your reference to "Jews" made in this derogatory way in no way furthered the story, and in my opinion should not have been used. For me an interesting book has been spoiled' (94). This criticism is akin to the common dislike of explicit sex or violence used 'gratuitously' in art. I would argue that Coetzee is about the least likely of authors to include gratuitous sex, violence or racism in his work—he seems to me to have a scrupulous

regard for 'the overall coherence of the novel' (in Goldsmith's words), but clearly this reader disagreed—and felt strongly enough that he or she would write to a world-famous Nobel-Prize-winning author to tell him so. As a reviewer, I would hope to try and provide some guidance to readers about what fiction is and is not, what authors might be aiming to achieve, and the pitfalls of reading without some kind of awareness that the words on the page are not always intended to be interpreted simply and literally.

There is room for a variety of viewpoints among readers, although, as Rebecca Solnit has recently discovered, that is not apparent to everyone, in particular the man who responded to her statement that she identified with Nabokov's *Lolita* by saying, 'To read *Lolita* and "identify" with one of the characters is to entirely misunderstand Nabokov'. On the other hand, as she points out,

there's a currently popular argument that books help us feel empathy, but if they do so they do it by helping us imagine that we are people we are not. ... The popular argument that novels are good because they inculcate empathy assumes that we identify with characters.

This, of course, is the line taken by Booth, as discussed above. But Solnit points out the danger of this belief, because there are books in the canon that 'inculcate denigration and degradation of women as cool things to do'. This applies not only to women, of course, but to any less powerful beings, human or animal. Solnit cites Arthur C. Danto's work, arguing that 'art can inflict moral harm and often does, just as other books do good'. They can help us feel empathy but they can also help us fail in empathy if they just reinforce our existing beliefs by acting like an echo chamber. And they help perpetuate oppression by operating on the oppressed as well:

You read enough books in which people like you are disposable, or are dirt, or are silent, absent, or worthless, and it makes an impact on you. Because art makes the world, because it matters, because it makes us. Or breaks us. (Solnit)

There is of course no guarantee that a particular work of literature, once it has been published, will reach only those readers attuned to the ironic or satirical qualities of its author's particular voice. Should it be part of the critic's role to help make these readers understand that the attitudes expressed in a novel are not always shared by the author, and show them other, less judgemental, ways of reading literature?

I do believe that a careful reading of a novel can sometimes tease out some opinions that are at least more in tune with their author's thinking than others, but why should this be important? I wonder if it has to do with a certain pervasive idea that art should be in some not altogether straightforward way 'truthful'. Iris Murdoch said that 'a novelist working well and honestly, and only saying what he (*sic*) knows and what he

understands, will in fact tell a lot of important truths about his society' (W.K. Rose 18). She discussed the implications for criticism of this idea in her essay 'Art is the Imitation of Nature':

It is instructive in art to look at the critical vocabulary—what sort of things the critics say, most naturally, about the form of art. Some criticism of literature is purely formal, but very much more of it is, somehow, moral, and, in particular the critic may accuse the writer of some kind of lying or misrepresentation. Words used about novels such as 'sentimental', 'pretentious', 'vulgar', 'trivial', 'banal' and so on, impute a kind of falsehood. (245)

My own reviews certainly fit in this mould and I use most of these words from time to time to describe fiction that does not ring true to me. This is of course a subjective judgement. The example Murdoch often used when asked about bad fiction was Ian Fleming's James Bond series:

they're about the great popular hero who has lots of girls and is good looking, all-powerful, always successful, violent—this is indeed an image of the ego. In a great novel you don't feel that the elementary, illusory values are the only thing that the novelist is interested in. He is not deceived by them, he is not simply displaying his egoistic fantasy life. If he mentions them, he will place them in some way. A good novelist does this instinctively: he shows the falseness of illusion. (Lesser 15)

And in turn, these words could equally be directed at book reviewers. In 2014 John Dale wrote a contentious article for *The Conversation* complaining about the Australian reviewing scene. In response, Peter Rose wrote: 'What a clichéd, ungenerous and discreditable overview of book reviewing in this country, with its sentimental and predictable coda about mythic Manhattan standards'. So it seems that cliché, predictability, superficiality and sentimentality are common criticisms of literature, of reviews and even of critiques of reviewing.

What is at stake in this contest? Is the standard of criticism important because of the power of art to change the way we think, and falsity in art, and consequently in criticism of art, is therefore really dangerous? Experienced and thoughtful critics are, contrary to Dale's opinion, abundant in Australian literary culture; and whatever their formal qualifications, they help their fellow readers navigate the nuances and ambiguities of literature not by instructing them in the 'correct' way of reading but by offering critiques based on informed attention to the individual work. I believe this is what Cavell means by mastering one's subjectivity. The critiques of individual reviewers may be idiosyncratic and may contradict each other, and that's as it should be, as long as one's main object of attention is the work being reviewed. Peter Rose, in his riposte to Dale, quotes Frank Kermode's introduction to his book *Pleasing Myself*: 'So I educate myself in

public, which I take to be the reviewer's privilege' (Kermode viii). There is one point on which I differ from Rose, however:

Dale's article is full of arresting assertions. 'Book reviewing is about the reader', he confidently asserts. Which reader? Most of the critics I know feel a greater sense of obligation to the work itself, free of commercial or promotional considerations.

Although I know many people read book reviews to decide whether to buy a book, I agree that commercial and promotional considerations should never be allowed to colour one's judgement, and, in any case, we can't predict our various readers' expectations. Kerry Goldsworthy points out that

some readers regard book reviewing as a consumer guide, others as a form of entertainment, others as an intellectual contribution to the cultural conversation, and still others as a minor art form in itself.

But I do believe that as reviewers we pay close attention to the work in order to communicate our reflections and opinions to the potential readers of our reviews. 'Obligation to the work itself', in the sense of open-minded attention and disinterested assessment, is essential, but although creative writers may write without consciously considering their audience, as a reviewer I am undertaking a deliberate act of communication with fellow readers, from my particular coordinates of taste and experience, to offer them an example of engagement with this particular work, and to attempt to excise my ethical views from this communication would be another kind of falsity.

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Notes

[1] William K. Wimsatt, and Monroe C. Beardsley argued in their influential article 'The Intentional Fallacy' that 'the design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art.'

[2] *The Writer's Room* ceased publication in December 2015 and the issues are no longer available online. Wood has now published a collection of the interviews from the series as a book.

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Parallelism in Modern Azerbaijani language

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Key words: Language, term, grammar, phonetics, telecommunication lexicological, rule, international, vocabulary, development, lexical, science, innovation, systematization, mean, logical, semantic, understand, functional styles, literary language, information, monosemy, polysemy, ordinary, feature, reason, sign, structuralize, notion, idea

The term and the notion appear at the same time under the condition of close mutual relation. There is the relation of event and essence, form and context between the term and notion. The term doesn't call the notion as an ordinary word, the notion is appointed by the term. The meaning of the term is its appointment. If the appointment is not known, then the term is not known either, that is to say that the term doesn't call the notion as an ordinary word, the notion is attached to it. Therefore, as the general rule, we speak not about the lexicological meaning of the term, but about its content. The content of the term is its appointment. Besides, the practice of the work on creation of the terminological systems shows that the terminological area is related to certain limits.

The first limit is that the terms included in the terminology of science and technique are the names of certain notions and therefore they are expressed in the form of noun.

The second limit is that special names are separately called terms.

The third limit: the nomenclature names are not included in the object of the terminology. But adjustment of the terminology of different areas shall be implemented on the basis of adjustment of the nomenclatures. For

example, the nomenclatures used in the terminology of chemistry, physics, mathematics are included in the arsenal of the terminology. The term is a word and is included in the row of words that have special meaning. The specification of the terms shall be defined while distinguishing the terms from generally used words. Mostly, the specification not of the term, but of the object expressed by them is considered.

The aspects differing the terms from generally used words are the followings:

1. It is obvious while comparing the specific characters of the terms with generally used words: The lexicological units used more in the language, understood by everybody and making the basis of the language are called generally used words. The term encircles specific notions that are formed exactly from logical point of view in the different areas of science and technique.
2. As the terms express scientific-technical notions, they are used in the scientific style more among the functional styles of the literary language. The scientific information is delivered to the reader in the exact and close form. Generally used words are used in all functional styles.
3. As the terms express the notions, concepts used in the different sectors of science and technique, the meaning of those notions are understood by the specialists. Generally used words are lexicological words that are clear for most people.
4. The terms are inclined to monosemy more. Thus, mainly the terms used in any field of science has strongly fixed one meaning. For example, while pronouncing such terms as triangle, function, atom, number, current, angle, speed, rhombus, square, formula, theorem, magnet, liquid, gas each of them has a meaning notwithstanding the content.

The context (word environment) explains more generally used words.

The context is not necessary in the terminology. Any term is used in the same meaning out of the as in the area where it is included. For example, the word "vacuum" means as a space from which the air has been removed. This term is used only in one meaning both within and out of the context. In this way, lens means "transparent substance that is limited by spherical or other surfaces", molecule means "particle formed by the group of combinations of atoms of different chemical elements", square means

“right-angled geometric thing which opposite parts are equal”, resonance means “the event having the biggest amplitude of compulsory dances of the thing when the change frequency of the obligatory strength is equal to the particular dance frequency of the thing”.

As it is seen, monosemy is complete expression of the sign of the language in the system of certain notions.

But sometimes one term may be used in some fields of science and technique. For example, “semantic method” may be used both in the mathematics and linguistics, “metabolism” is used both in the mathematics and biology, “mutual influence” is used both in the mathematics and physics.

From the first of view they are seen as polysemy, but it is used in one meaning in the area where it is entered. Thus, the meaning of every term is appointed by the terminology of a certain scientific field with the system of notions. For example, the term “differentiation” means division of a whole into different parts, forms, layers and degrees in the mathematics and splintering of unique organism group into two or more directions according to one of the directions peculiar for evolution in the evolution process in the biology, division of a social whole or its part into elements having mutual relation in the economy, one of the principal processes that characterize the development of the relative languages in the linguistics, as the collection of physical-chemical processes forming the rocks having different composition or consisting of the same minerals in the different correlation from magma in the chemistry. /1, p. 481/. It is difficult to imagine that the common aspects may be neutralized. Therefore, monosemy is not in the context in the terminology, but it is related to the area that it concerns. But polysemy is an ordinary case in the generally used words, different words doesn't make hindrances to each other, that is to say that they make no difficulties, misunderstanding in the process of intercourse, because general text, condition plays an important role in explanation of the meaning of any word.

It is not possible to say it about scientific terms.

Notwithstanding above-mentioned facts, it is not possible to understand the character of monosemy in the terms. It is obvious from above-mentioned examples that sometimes the term is used in the different meanings. It is

not possible to deny it. As G.O.Vonokur wrote: "special scientific-technical terms sometimes can not escape from polysemy." [2,p. 4].

As the result, it is necessary to state that the requirement that shall be met by the terms is their utilization in one meaning in the certain fields of science and technique or relative fields. But it is correct not to speak about monosemy, but the inclination of monosemy here.

5. One of the characteristic aspects for the terms is their exactness. The terms are the nominees of the system of notions of science and technique. Therefore, the principal signs of the notion shall be reflected in those terms.

The necessity of correct selection of the signs distinguishing certain objects from other objects occurs as there are a lot of fields having the system of language signs in the field of science and technique. Exact expression of some notions, their calling contributes to differing that notion from other notions in the terminology.

This process (parallelism) observed in the field of terminology is harmful for the terminology. D.S.Lotte stated specially the synonym in the terms and showed that implementation of this requirement made no hindrance in the natural process of the formation of the term systems under constant neologism condition [3, 23]. Certainly, it is possible to agree with this idea in the case when the process of becoming out-of date and replacing any term is reflected in certain terminological dictionaries. It is necessary to state that the terminological lexicology is more stable in comparison with the lexicology of the literary language.

The practice shows that the same new notion is not expressed by one nominee by different scientists in the terminology. Attitude to a new notion, its explanation, estimation by different people shows itself. At the same time the criterion of correct estimation of each name given to a new scientific notion is uncertain. Besides, the process of selection of the terms expressing the same name more exactly is long-term and new term version of that notion may be created over this period. Thus, the reason of expression of the notions by the terms more exactly in the terminological system, violation of exactness comes forward sometimes by utilization of new terms by the author not being aware of other term or sometimes by not taking into account the possibilities of the native language. For example, creation of electromagnetic waves by alternating current or charged particles moving urgently is called emanation in the classic

electrodynamics. But besides, the term "radiation" is used in the terminology of physics. The first term expresses the notion more exactly. Sometimes the parallelism is observed in the term, term-word combinations created on the basis of internal possibilities of our language. For example, the wave front, the length of the wave, the wave surface; mathematical waiting, mean value; reactive force, reactive pulling; beginning meridian, zero meridian; atmosphere pressure, weather pressure. Expression of certain idea by different words is possible in the literary language. But every notion shall be expressed only by one term in the terminology. At the same time every term shall serve to expression of only one notion of the field of science, technique that it is related to. If it is not so, misunderstanding may occur in learning of different knowledge areas, delivery of the achievements of science and technique to the population. Besides being exact, the scientific-technical term shall be suitable in order to apply it independently, that is to say that to use it as the integral part in the combined or compound terms. The meaning of separate parts of every term shall not be contradicted with the meaning of the term.

Non-correspondence of the meaning of separate terms to their context comes forward from not paying attention to the signs, aspects that distinguish such or so objects from other.

6. The terms are neutral from the point of view of style. That is to say that the terms are used in the same meaning in the artistic work as they used in the fields of science. For example, the combination of term "magnetic area" is used in the meaning as "the area characterized by mechanical power exerting influence on electric current directed in the certain order" both in the artistic work and scientific work. As well as such terms as square, function, triangle, ion, fluid, neutron and etc. are used in the meaning of the name of the notions in any area.

The terminological lexicology is dry in itself. Therefore, the terms are used in the same meaning not depending on the text where it is used, on the words that they are encircled and etc.

But some investigators followed P.G.Piatrovsky and wrote that it was not possible to speak about total stylistic neutrality of both scientific and professional term. The term losses its own expressiveness and attains meaning shade belonging to the special context. This idea of Piatrovsky is not correct. If we are really speaking about certain terminological system, it is neutral from stylistic point of view. For example, atom keeps its meaning

as the least particle keeping all chemical and most physical characters in itself, atmosphere means as layer of weather encircling the Earth. Thus, it is necessary to distinguish exactly the terminological area where the term is neutral with the non-terminological area where it has lost its neutrality in order to understand the term as a term.

Besides, expressing a notion related to a certain field, the term has only one meaning. It loses the right to be the term of a certain area when it is used in other meaning. In this case that term becomes a word or the term of other area, or it becomes an ordinary generally used word. The origin of the term, its root plays an important role here.

7. The matter of terms and emotionalism, expressiveness

General words have such characters as emotionalism, expressiveness, modalism and etc. characters in the literary language. Thus, if the terms express different concepts, ordinary word combinations don't only express the concepts, but at the same time show the attitude towards them. For example, in the sentence "Your daughter-in law mixed everything" negative attitude of speaking person is obvious. But notwithstanding availability of the affix "cik" in the Azerbaijani language of the sentence "helium atom nucleus that are ionized twice, that is to say that lost their electrons are called alpha particles", no attitude or emotionalism is expressed here. So, figurativeness takes an important part in the ordinary word combinations.

8. The meaning of ordinary words is formed and changed in the conversation process. Different contexts where the words are included play an important role. The contexts bring nearer or estrange the meaning of words. The condition is not so in terms. The internal context of terms changes in connection with the re-grouping of notions in such or so scientific area and with development of science.

9. A specific aspect peculiar to the terms is first of all related to the fact that they are the units of scientific language. The terms that are the exact expressers of the scientific notions typify them by being used in the scientific style. Utilization of terms in the real meaning in the scientific style is necessary. It is related to the duty of the scientific style. The scientific style gives exact and correct information about natural and society events and is a style that is used to explain their essence and conformity to laws. Not the emotional shade, but the meaning of a word plays an important role in this style. At the same time it is necessary to take into account that the

purpose of the scientific explanation is exertion influence on the sense and logical understanding. The scientific style is not for emotional understanding, but for logical understanding. Thus, utilization of the terms not in the metaphorical meaning, but in the true meaning is required, because the scientific style is used for giving correct and exact information on the natural phenomenon and events of the society and to prove the conformities to laws. Thus, the terms shall be used in one and exact meaning.

At the same time the same term is used by the people representing different faiths and ideological fronts by putting them in a special form. Such exceptions come forward from difference of the composition of the terminological system. The cases of emotionalism and expressiveness in the terminology of sciences are less that in the terminology of social-political sciences. But as we stated before, emotionalism cannot be constant character of terms here. Because the shade of context is taken as a basis in science. Thus, the terms have the following specific peculiarities:

1. The terms express scientific-technical notions and belong to certain field.
2. The terms are the sign of the scientific notion as the unit of the scientific language.
3. The term bears nominative and definitive function.
4. There is concrete definition in the area where the terms are used and this definition is formed based on the meaning that the notion expresses.
5. The meaning of the term doesn't depend on the context.
6. The terms are exact: they have neither emotionalism, nor expressiveness.
7. The terms are inclined to the monosemanticity.
8. The terms are neutral from the stylistic point of view.
9. The terms are the units of the scientific style.

The number of terms increases day by day in our language in connection with development of science and technique. Analysis of these

terms from the linguistic point of view, giving scientific explanation of their semantic and syntactical characters are one of the matters set as a task.

The terms available in the language are the names of the things, processes, objective realities, events and the notions about them. It is the basis of principal essence of the terms. The term is the word or word combination conforming directly with the scientific notion of the language and serving to its expression.

Thus, the term is the word or word combination that conforms to certain notion in the system of notions of science and technique as the language sign. But disputable matters occur in determination of the terms from the functional point of view. Thus, the term encircles necessary and satisfactory signs of the notion as the language unit. Reflection of the signs of the notion in the structure of the term involves attention of the scientists. Positive solution of this problem contributes to combination of the "meaning" and the "context" in one totally formed language unit. Therefore, the investigators tried to establish language codes in order to express the notions in such or so scientific areas. Thanks to the efforts of these scientists (4, 223) the mankind obtained solution of a lot of special matters solved without mistake not from the linguistic point of view, but from the logical point of view. For example, joining of the signs of the notions inside the language unit equivalent to the word was proved in the examples of chemical, mathematical terminology. It stipulates formation of the special type of terms- definitive terms.

The term definitive is taken from the word "definition" from the Latin language. Its meaning is the brief logical appointment keeping the most principal signs of any notion. The terms keeping the necessary and satisfactory signs of any object, notion having meaning and context structure in itself and having brief logical appointment are called definitive terms.

The reason of looking for linguistic and semantic styles for formation of the signs of the structuralized notion is that the term may be accepted as the appointment\logic of the notion. Such idea was pronounced from the ancient time. This idea was developed and the academician V.V.Vinogradov wrote about special definitive function of the term: "The word has nominative and definitive function, i.e., it is an exact signing means. In this case it is a simple sign or the mean of logically appointment of the word, the science is the term" [5, 12-13].

In such word combination as "axis of z-s" was determined from the logical point of view belonging to the mathematics. That is to say that this term has expressed totally a notion. The definition is written as a sign to the term, it determines the structure of the appointment of the notion of necessary and satisfactory signs. The investigators acknowledge the possibility of formation of the terms that reflect, keep in themselves and the necessary and satisfactory signs of the notion state that this style has limited possibilities.

But it is possible to form stable terminological combinations meeting the requirements of the exactness. It is possible to give as an example the work of Lotte about scientific-technical terms having three elements, as well as the standards of terms suggested for synthetically materials for the efforts to establish the system of terms of definitive type.

The practical importance of such investigations is that it contributes to wide distribution of standardization of the scientific and technical terms having international importance. Availability of the investigation work belonging to the analysis of semantic development of word as a matrix of termination notions brought to formation of terms having more than 15 formats (morphemes) for example, in chemistry biology and etc.

It is more than it is in ordinary words. It is not accidental that the terms of mathematics, physics, chemistry that are considered the standard of the terminological systems of definitive type principally belong not to the oral speech, but also to writing. It is interesting that the idea of aspection that is to say that semantic aspection was developed in the bibliographic information that praises the idea of definitive analysis belonging to Ranganat and they are not applied only at Ranganat's works. The formation of aspect was missed in the work "terminological rules" and formation of aspects with natural language means of the structuralized notion.

Notions formed in the result of development of science and technique express some concepts. Nominative word and word combinations that mean the notion are termed by the way of specialization passing through the fields of science or scientific thinking of the objects, events, reality. That is to say that the term is not only a scientific-technical lexicological unit, it is also the lexicological unit of the language of other areas of the social activities. It finds its definitive definition in by means of intellectual scientific understanding in the system of traditional terminological notion. For example, electric loads – collection of different events related to their

movement and mutual influence; power- quantity that expresses the influence by the material world to the particle; thermometer- device for measuring temperature according to changes of the physical characteristics of substances; acceleration- vector quantity that characterize changing of the value and direction of the material point according to time; graphic – geometric description of the functional dependence on the plane [5; 6; 7]. Such understanding of the term was suggested for the first time by P.V.Veselov in the Russian linguistics [8].

This idea provides precision of special words of different fields as terms. Special word is used in the wide meaning here. Thus, it encircles not only science and technique, but also the terminological system of the lexicological units of different areas of social activities. It is necessary to state that other areas of social activities (religion, sport, terminology of culture) differ from the scientific terminology by their specific characters. The terminological notions in other fields are accepted by the way of scientific understanding and explanation of denotates, scientific reflexes of the words naming them. That is to say that, besides the individual characters of the things and events, it is necessary to take into account general and important characters peculiar to them in order to call them. Different and alike features of the things are called their signs. The notions shall reflect general and important signs of the things. For example, the important feature of the notion "square" is the fact that they are equal and right-angled. All point of square are not as the same distance from its center. The head points are located in the furthest distance and the middle points of sides are the nearest points. Or, while speaking about circle, we imagine that is consists of a closed line. But the idea that not all closed line is a circle was not occurred at once. This idea appeared after having compared the circle with closed lines, as well as rectangle, triangle and other figures and having understood important signs of the circle. Closed line of the circle is not its important sign and the sign that differs the circle from other mathematical objects (rectangle, triangle, trapezium). But notwithstanding that we take the character of the circle composing of the points at the same distance from a point on a plane as the definion of the circle. The circle will differ from rectangle, triangle and other figures consisting of closed lines.

Therefore, every science has the notions peculiar to itself in learning of terms. The principal matter of mathematics consists of learning of the space forms in the real world and the quantity correlations. A lot of notions are

formed in the mathematics in solution of this matter and included in the system. Ideas are advanced about many things and inventions are made. Every made mathematical idea are expressed by words thanks to the words attached to each other. That is to say that, analysis of the same objective process or event by means of different methods may bring to establishment of real systems and notions of real conditions according to them of the view differed from each other.

While speaking about definitive terms the first place of the scientific terminology in the macro system of the general terminology, because the scientific term is directly related to the scientific notion. Every term is differed in the scientific system that it belongs by its monosemy and exactness.

As to the character of the definition of the rest part of the general terminological macro system the terms are agreed directly with the system of scientific notions, the term formed on the basis of real practice gives the interpretation of the context of the scientific notions and determines its limits in order to get definition. For example, the rectangle which the front sides are parallel, that is to say that is located on the straight lines is called parallelogram. The parallelogram which all angles are right angles is called the rectangle. The rectangle which all sides are equal is called right-angled square. The parallelogram which all sides are equal is called rhomb.

In the mentioned definitions the relation of the parallelogram, then its distinguishing character is stated. At the same time there is no information about the angles in the definition about the parallelogram. The sign that all angles are right bears the function of difference between the parallelogram and the rectangle.

While speaking about the systematic character of the terminology, we consider the double systematic character – the systematic characters of the notion and signs. Correspondence of these two systems eliminates polysemy, homonymy, even partial doubling. All of them meet the requirement of the terminology and definitive terms.

One of the principal features of the term is that it expresses the notion, represents it and the meaning of the term is reflected in its definition. But in some of the terms the definitive explanation may be instead of the definition of the term. But the terms that can obtain the definition passed from the "scientific abstraction" are the terms that can obtain the definition.

Differing from the scientific technical terms instead of the exact definition of the notion, its descriptive explanation is given in the social-political terms. This ideological content is formed by the influence of the social-political text. Therefore, the definitive terms are more in the scientific technical terminology.

Semantic termination of own words of the language, obtaining terms, borrowing as a translation loan word, formation of terms by the method of grammatic methods.

S.Khalilova wrote: The most optimum condition from the factors of getting term and internationalization is formed when both the foreign membrane and internal meaning of the term and the definitive descriptive content are composed maximum closely to each other in the different languages [9, 28].

The terms formed in such optimum condition may form international funds. Most of the international terms meet the requirements of the definitive terms. The sexual systematic character has found its model form.

The definitive terms differ from the commemorative terms by their formation method. Thus, formation of the commemorative terms is related to certain historical event. For example, the surname of the captain Ch.K.Boycott is on the basis of the term "boycott". This Irish captain was the owner of the proper house in the Ireland and he behaved the lessors cruelly. Special decision was taken by the league of land of the Irish lessors in order to isolate him in 1880 and the decision was named after Ch.K.Boycott. Afterwards, his surname became generalized and the term "boycott" was formed.

Such commemorative terms are used in the terminology of mathematics and physics. For example, the law of Charles is one of the ideal gas laws: it was named after the French physician J. Charles. Or Debay law that appoints dependence of a solid thing on temperature of heat capacity near absolute zero was determined by D.Debay in 1912. Euclidean geometry is the geometry that is formed on the basis of absolute geometrical axioms and Euclidean axiom of parallelism. The systematic commentary was given in the III century BC by Euclid. Euler angles are generalized coordinates that determines the movement of the thing that has one immovable point. It was entered into science in 1748 by L. Euler.

The meaning precipice occurs between the notion and concept in such terms. That is to say that semantics, meanings is not taken as basis in concept. The most necessary features are taken as basis in the definitive terms. Thus, innovation is realized in the material form of the word in the commemorative terms and in the logical meaning of the word in the definitive terms.

The definitive terms include not only the terms consisting of a simple term, but also the terms in the combination form. It is true that increase of the terms having multiple components (that is to say that, four five....p number of components) decreases the frequency of optimum utilization of the terminology. Notwithstanding that increase of the components of the term helps to the representation of the principal aspects of the notion, its voice form makes the language heavier. A dilemma appears here. Thus increase of components correctly appoints the term from the semantic point of view and specifies its meaning. But such terms excludes the terms from the terminology. Besides the first feature, the second feature is taken as basis for the definitive terms, because the semantic exactness shall be reflected in the definition of the term. Nomination shall be realized in high level and shall correspond to the lexicologic-phonetic criteria of the language. Therefore, the matter of reformation of the terms of multiple components is put in the definition of the terms.

But terminologies of a lot of fields have been adjusted and standardized up to date.

It is not possible to allow purism in the terminology for the purpose of formation of definitive terms.

Total or partial unification of the terminology helps to better understanding of the lexicological-semantic content of the terms. But the differences between the objective structures of the languages of different systems, internal development conformities and intralinguistic characters of the languages impede to their realization both by artificial and natural way. The problems in solution of the problems of unification of the terminology is deepened so that terms are obtained from the languages differed from each other by their structure-typological characters origin and social functions. Therefore the idea of unification of the foreign membrane of the terms is appeared in the world languages. Hence, there is total language correspondence and a lot of definitive terms according to the unification from the point of view of form.

"The unification matter of the terminology may be realized only after the internationalization of all terminological system of the language, and it is not a matter that is possible in real form" [9, 57].

All principal characters of the terminology, the requirements on ideal terms, unification of the terminological system and terminological field, regulation problems and other matters have appeared on the basis of the materials of the scientific technical terminology and from the theoretical point of view.

Increase of the lexical-terminological materials in connection with understanding of the newest problems occurred by means of increase and development of the relevant areas of science from the point of view of reorganization is usually realized by traditional methods. Obtaining of new words and terms from other languages or in some cases attaining a new meaning of the words and terms in the language takes an important place and it organizes the first and principal line of enrichment of the language.

Sometimes notwithstanding wrong composition of the term or combination in the language, its utilization in ready form in the original or intermediary language gets stable. Though that wide mass of people refuse utilization of such strange terms, the specialists of narrow areas of specials accept them and have conservative position against re-composition of such units. Certainly, it doesn't cause to so much objection in the scientific terminology, because total differing of the terms from ordinary words of the language is allowed in that terminological system, there is a liberal attitude to this matter in the literature of linguistics. But this matter is otherwise in the social-political terminology. The terms related to this area shall have way to the national speech and so, fundamental differing of the term from ordinary words of the language is not allowed, otherwise, the term will not be used every day. Herein it is not possible to allow determination of incorrectly composed term. D.S. Lotte wrote: "We consider wrong this point of view spread among some linguists: if a "wrong" term is used in the language, it shall not be touched, a new term having analogical structure may not be suggested. It is hardly expedient to follow this point of view in the terminological work" (4,157).

Availability of distinct terminological rows helps to correct composition of the term. It is necessary to compose a term borrowed from other language by comparing the foreign membrane of the term with alike terms existing for a long time in the terminological system of the language. As to the problem of wrong utilization of the term, it shall be written in the individual

massive of the author. Utilization of correctly composed term by making amendments is not related to exact determination of that term. Wrong utilization of the term (as a paronomic mistake) is an individual matter.

The scientific terms differ by being a stable system, existence inside "close" limits. But it is not possible to concern this clause to the terminological group called social-political lexicology unconditionally. Social and political terms are known and lucid for everybody in connection with participation of the people in the social and political life of the country. Despite typical terms which the meanings are clear for a certain group of people show themselves. An important part of social-political terms consists of generally used words having terminological meaning.

The character of the terminology upon the history is that it is not possible to put limit between term and non-term: contrary, the investigators state that there is an entire lexicological strata.

A concept reflects general necessary and satisfactory aspects of notion. The meaning of the term notion is closer to concept.

The followings are principal in connection of the term with the concept in the definitive terms:

1. Concept is wider that meaning, that is to say that the meaning of the term reflects only some characters of concept. A concept may be clear only for specialists. For example, cosmos, atom, atmosphere, electric and etc.
2. Concept has the quality of the meaning of the term and terminological combination. That is to say that it includes satisfactory and necessary aspects of notion. But differing from scientific terms, word is related to certain descriptions besides concept. Word can reflect feelings, dreams and willings, attitude to a creature. In the scientific terms the meaning of the term is the relation between the term and the image of the thing. The meaning of the term plays a role of a basis in formation of a notion and it is a mean that forms and develops the concept. As we know, appearance of a concept is related to thought. Emotional volitional, esthetic aspects of reflection of the additional creature is available in thought. Thus, besides that the meaning of a word is connected with concept, it includes emotional, volitional and etc. aspects. Only concept is appointed from the logical point of view in the term and terminological combination. That is to say that its principal qualities, the aspects directly related with human thought are taken into account. For example, while speaking about the

terminological combination "four roses" in the mathematics, first of all we understand that the roses are four, but this combination has other meaning. That is to say that "four roses" means "sin 20 function graphic to "r"". So, material voice volume concept is reflected here, in the reality word shall be considered the sign of concept. When a thing influences thought, image of the thing, an idea about the thing shall appear in conscience. But as the logical aspect is superior in the definitive terms, reflection of the voice volume of the term, that is to say that relation with understanding (significative meanings) is weak.

It is known that reflection of the foreign world, things and events in the conscience is called perception, idea, concept. But, is there a relation between the meaning of the term (significative) and this event?

Feeling, idea, perception and concepts are different forms of reflection of the foreign world in the conscience. The forms of conscience are principal in the meaning of the definitive terms.

3. As a scientific concept may be expressed by a special term it can be expressed by a combination either. That is to say that the concept is wider than the meaning of the term, therefore it cannot be reflected in one term. For example, "dynamic programming", "electromechanical model", "conditional mathematical expectation", "total differential equation", "module of natural logarithms" and etc. The notion of the second combination expresses wider meaning. But the first combination is important from the point of view of compactness and shortness. Besides, it is suitable for the specialists. While speaking about concept, we consider absolutely scientific concepts belonging to the scientific areas.

While speaking about concept in the terminology, we speak about scientific notions belonging to science. For example, mathematics: number, function, integral, equation, graphic, square, root, theorem, parallelogram, rhombus, cone, integral; physics: atom, neutron, ion, ray, radiation, wave resonance, electric, strength, atmosphere, speed; economics: value, budget, coefficient, surplus value.

At the same time concept is the generalize reflection of homogenous events particular to the foreign world in human brain. Concept formed about certain things and events reflects all important aspects peculiar to that category. That is to say that it separates important aspect available at

the thing from the secondary aspects. The specialist thinks thanks to concepts, the concept is appeared in terms, terminological combinations.

As the academician Mirzejanzade wrote, determination of concepts where the theory of physics relies on comprises the essence of the matter.

In the reality, concept is the category particular to logic, word to linguistics. But it becomes clear from the investigation of the definitive term that concept is the principal category of linguistics besides logic. Thus, if concept is the generalized reflection of the thing in human conscience, the voice composition of word reflects this thing. The term is related to a thing only thanks to its meaning. Therefore, voice composition of the term shall not be considered artificial or conditional, because the voice composition of any term is related to the meaning on the basis of social practice in the historical development process. Therefore, meaning is taken as basis in the definitive terms. That is to say that the voice volume is established on the basis of meaning. For example, as the things in the terminological combinations as "multangular pyramid", "right angled triangle" influence vision organs, its image is formed in our conscience. In the result, it is necessary to state that the term expresses specific notions formed exactly from the logical point of view in the different branches of science and technique.

Calling of notions, concepts appeared in the result of fast development of science and technique is necessary. This necessity stipulates formation of terms. Formation of terms leans against the matters of general theoretical derivation of the scientific language, thus, all properties and qualities of terms appear only in the professional areas. Hence, formation of term is such a process that exactness and determination of its definition is important in this process. Besides utilization of all arsenal of word building means, there are specific term formation methods in the terminology. In case when it is possible to appoint certain part of these methods on the basis of some signs, general explanation of their certain part is indefinite and they are stated as exception. Especially, theorem, postulate reactions and laws are discovered and concepts are formed in the technical terminology. These notions are not expressed by terms, but symbols and signs. Symbols and signs are not used in all fields of science. These symbols are a lot in mathematics, chemistry, physics, medicine. This symbols and signs used in different scientific areas play a role of communication, information carrier between the specialists of those areas.

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A Defence of Tempered Praise and Tempered Criticism in Book Reviewing

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The academic, critic and nun Veronica Brady once wrote that Thomas Keneally 'has always been a writer who mattered, even when he is writing too much too quickly' (74). For several reasons, I often ponder this brilliant line. First, it captures a fundamental truth—perhaps *the* fundamental truth—about Keneally's oeuvre. Indeed, it is an even more accurate appraisal of Keneally's legacy in 2016, taking into consideration his more than fifty published books, than it was when it appeared in the literary magazine *Meanjin* in 1979. Second, the brevity of Brady's observation is admirable: she uses so few words to say so much so well. Third, Brady here offers a mixed critical response: she is at once positive and negative about Keneally, with the two responses commingling rather than competing; her tone is moderate.

In this essay, I offer a defence of tempered praise and tempered criticism in book reviewing—or at least, a tempered defence of such responses. Although I review both fiction and non-fiction, here I contain my comments to fiction and use Australian examples. Looking back on over a decade of reviewing fiction (I published my first review of fiction in 2006), I find that, for me, a measured sort of positivity has frequently been my chosen response to individual works of fiction.

This positivity is almost never absolute or unstinting; instead, it usually sits amongst measured criticism. I am unsurprised to find various degrees of positivity so well represented in my collected criticism, because my foundational philosophy as a critic—a conscious, considered and long-held starting point—is that it is an achievement to write an average novel or short story. In my view, a 'reasonably good' but flawed novel or collection of stories warrants a 'reasonably positive' review. I believe this starting point—it is personal, not something I seek to push upon other critics—is consistent with the responsibility of the critic to produce a rigorous and honest critique of a book. It also allows, in my view, a critic to judge a book against a standard of perceived excellence: while it is an achievement to write an 'reasonably good' book, that achievement is not the attainment of excellence.

Although this essay will make a case for tempered praise and tempered criticism, I agree with Gideon Haigh, whose brief 2010 provocation about what he calls the 'demise' of book reviewing in Australia, worries about timid reviewing practices, as well as 'sheer dullness and inexpertise' (9, 10). But I see no automatic correlation between, on the one hand, timidity, and on the other hand, a polite, respectful and measured tone. Amongst a mostly intemperate list of complaints about the supposed poor state of book reviewing in Australia, John Dale quotes US writer John Updike's rules to himself as critic, which include this key point: 'Try to understand the failure' (Dale; Updike xvi-xvii). This is, I believe, one key role of the critic: with the right to criticise comes an obligation to do so responsibly.

Haigh and Dale both offer examples of what Kerryn Goldsworthy has aptly described as the 'decline polemic' (Goldsworthy). The debate can be summarised thus: book reviewers in Australia are incompetent *and* book reviewers in Australia are bootlickers and cowards *and* book reviewers in Australia are bullies. As Angela Bennie suggests, 'What is most evident about these prevailing perceptions, these rumblings, is that they point to a profound mistrust of the motives and the abilities of the critic in our culture' (10). Bennie published her book in 2006, but the debate remains familiar. I find James Bradley's 2013 comment convincing:

the 'debate' about reviewing is really just a stalking horse for a much bigger set of anxieties about what Australian writing is for, and about the democratisation of culture more generally ... Those anxieties seem to frame so much of the handwringing about reviewing and standards. (Goldsworthy)

Still, if critics currently endure a mixed or poor reputation, or if their relevance is increasingly in question in the digital, democratising moment, this situation is worth pondering. In mounting an argument in defence of tempered criticism, I unavoidably about one prominent and well-worn element of this debate about the state of criticism. It is this: is there too much softness and/or chumminess in Australian criticism, or, alternatively, is there too much snark? I find this 'soft versus snark' dichotomy as inadequate as the 'three cheers versus black armband' dichotomy of the inelegantly named history wars. Both dichotomies set artificial boundaries that then dictate the parameters of how a discussion might unfold and how 'a war' might be 'won'.

But if I accepted the usefulness of 'soft versus snark' dichotomy as a constructive way of appraising the reviewing landscape—I do not, but for a moment I will fake it—my reviews would fall towards the 'soft' end. When James Ley, quoted by Goldsworthy, refers to 'chronic soft-peddalling', he may well have in mind the sorts of reviews I write. When critic of critics Ben Etherington refers to the 'compliment sandwich', 'four or so paragraphs of positive commentary, then a passing criticism, quickly rescued by affirmation' (Etherington), he might well be describing one of my reviews,

with its mix of modulated positive and negative commentary. In distancing myself here from the 'soft versus stark' dichotomy, I hope not to adopt a defensive frame of mind—but if I appear defensive, so be it. Certainly, this essay is subjective. As the English writer and critic Tim Parks puts it, 'to be impartial about narrative would be to come from nowhere, to be no one' (50). Reading a novel can never be an objective act, and neither can writing a review of a novel. A review is itself a personal piece of writing, one that emerges not only from a reviewer's judgment of a book but also from the reviewer's experiences, beliefs and reading history.

In what follows, I reflect on my personal set of beliefs about criticism, about reading, about the importance of purpose of fiction. I do so, at least to an extent, through the techniques and spirit of exegetical scholarship. In the creative arts, exegetical scholarship acts as an appraisal of an artist's own processes, sometimes (though not always) in the form of a response to, or an explanation of, practice-led research (Dawson 194-5). As Nigel Krauth notes, the term 'exegetical', in the context of the creative arts, remains faithful to its original sense of there being a canonical or biblical text 'that the exegesis supports: i.e., a *canonical* text that *needs* explanations' (emphases in original; see also Kroll). However, there is an obvious difference between explaining, say, Genesis, and explaining your own primary text (Kroll). In turn, exegetical scholarship recognises the personal element of creativity but also of research itself. The creative arts exegesis was initially necessary to help legitimise the creative arts within the academy, but I suggest its utility has now broadened. Exegetical self-reflection helps show and explore some of the possibilities—the necessity, the inevitability—of acknowledging and invoking the personal element that exists in *all* scholarly research.

Nonetheless, the personal approach I adopt comes with caveats, including a recognition that western culture currently has a disproportionate focus on the personal. Apart from the increase in exegetical writing emerging from the academy, writers are increasingly required to discuss themselves. As Krauth puts it, 'Every time a writer is asked to provide a paper, give an informal talk, or contribute an article to a journal in the current Australian or international contexts *and in so doing talk about their own work*, they are asked to perform an exegetical function' (emphasis in original).

A contemporary focus on the self extends into the broader culture. While writing favourably about US critic Daniel Mendelsohn, Ley reflects on the 'current obsession with the realities of the self', which, Ley says, 'has created a situation in which the public sphere is swamped with the opinions, idle thoughts, revelations, commentaries, review and diaristic ramblings of anyone and everyone' (Ley, 'Age of Idiots'). Extending exegetical principles and an exegetical spirit to the context of book reviewing, as I do here, might well sound like self-absorbed navel gazing—because the only thing worse than a critic banging on about, say, why Jonathan Franzen is a fraud,

is a critic banging on about what it is like to be a critic banging on about why Franzen is a fraud. More problematically, exegetical commentary can slip too easily into self-justification. In this context, Haigh raises a point about the interconnectedness of the publishing and writing industry: 'After all, the author might be reviewing us one day, or perhaps already has. In which case, it may, of course, be payback time' (10). Later in this essay, I comment on Stella Clarke's scathing 2009 review of my novel, *Figurehead*. As a critic of fiction who is also a writer of fiction, I do not believe I equivocate to avoid the future unequivocal criticism of others—but I cannot prove it. Similarly, does my earlier point, that it is an achievement to write an average novel or story, reflect a certain sort of sensitivity? I believe not, but it is hardly my call.

Mark Davis addresses the broader cultural problem bluntly in his influential book, *Ganglands: Cultural Elites and the New Generationalism*: 'the loudest noises are the barely audible squeaks of barrows being pushed and the quiet hiss of urine entering pockets' (139). I am, I think, a reasonably typical example of the sticky issue Davis identifies. I am not solely a critic operating in a small national industry, but also a writer (in other words, someone whose fiction has been reviewed and will, hopefully, be reviewed again in the future, and someone seeking to find or keep a publisher), editor, board member of a magazine, board member of a state-based writers' organisation, academic (including teacher of student writers), judge of literary prizes, peer assessor for publicly funded writing grants, and so on.

Goldsworthy, citing several of the critics she surveyed, notes that 'allegations of cronyism and insularity have in turn been questioned, disputed, and discounted on a number of fronts, most commonly the idea that this sort of thing is peculiar to Australia'. While I agree that this issue is not a purely Australian phenomenon (Bennie 11-7), I take seriously this local version of insularity. Critics, like various other people in the industry, sit forever on the cusp of crossing a line of conflict of interest. In this essay, I have already cited a writer I have shared festival stages with, writers whose books I have reviewed or who have reviewed me, a writer who I have commissioned to write an essay, a writer whose non-fiction book I shortlisted for a book prize, and so on. I take seriously Davis' point that 'everything in the culture wars is connected' (Davis, 'At War'), even when his gaze is aimed at neoliberalism and its vast floodwaters. But I do not find the adoption of a self-consciously aggressive or negative approach, to 'prove' independence, an especially sophisticated solution.

Whatever the limitations and possible pitfalls of exegetical scholarship, the issues about book reviewing I canvass here have no legitimate response, in my view, other than the personal. Any individual interpretation of the role of the critic comes with personal baggage attached, whether or not a contributor wishes to acknowledge this. Peter Rose, the long-time editor

of *Australian Book Review*, [1] has argued that 'criticism—such an influential genre—is one of the least self-critical and transparent literary forms' (30; see also Goldsworthy). This discussion circles a fundamental if enduring question, which is also personal: what is the role of the critic? This question has a centuries-long history, but that history is not my focus particular here. [2] Goldsworthy notes a range of views about 'what a review ought ideally to be or do'. Susan Wyndham, literary editor of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, suggests that a reviewer's 'ultimate responsibility is to the wider culture', Rose suggests it is to the book itself, and former chief critic of *The Australian* newspaper (and now publisher at Picador) Geordie Williamson splits it 50/50 between the book and readers, 'who are trusting you to arbitrate honestly' (Goldsworthy; see also Rose 34).

My principal responsibility, as I see it, is to the book and to the way the book begins to find its place within the culture. Whether I love, loath or have mixed feelings about a book, I aim to talk back to it and, by extension, its author. I do not see this 'talking back' as an inferior act of writing or thinking, nor as an act of subservience. As such, I am mildly horrified by US novelist John Irving's suggestion that 'Reviews are only important when no one knows who you are. In a perfect world, all writers would be well-enough known to not need reviewers' (Hansen). In my view, it is the critic's job, or one of them, to generate and drive debate, while remembering that the book itself, rather than the critic's response to the book, anchors and founds the discussion. In an arc that spans excellent to awful, it is vital that a critic explains why they have reached their conclusions.

The question of tone is critical to my defence of tempered positivity and negativity in book reviewing. But the question of tone has a wider relevance, as Bradley points out:

For what it is worth, I think the problem is part of a deeper issue with Australian culture across the board, which is that we are almost incapable of distinguishing criticism and debate from personal attack. It's a problem that cuts both ways. Not only are we lousy at criticising something or somebody without attacking them personally, we're almost incapable of interpreting criticism without treating it as a personal attack. (Menzies-Pike)

The 'soft versus snark' dichotomy reflects, in my view, a broader problem in Australia regarding the way we go about publicly arguing/disagreeing with each other, not only about books and writing but about a range of artistic, cultural, political, historical and social matters, in which there seems to be no meaningful space between, on the one hand, blind deference, and, on the other hand, hectoring.

While I have faith—a word carefully chosen—in the speculative potency of fiction, and in fiction's capacity to reshape and re-energise vital issues, I nevertheless strive to keep the tone of my contribution to the debate

constructive. As John Updike puts it, soon after offering his rules for criticism, 'The communion between reviewer and his public is based upon the presumption of certain possible joys of reading, and all our discriminations should curve towards that end' (xvii; also see Dale). I endorse Updike's comment, even as I argue that fiction, including Updike's fiction, has a much more complex purpose than causing simple happiness. Being challenged or confounded by fiction is part of its joy, as is finding and honing entirely new ideas prompted by reading and interpreting. Alberto Manguel puts it like this: 'I believe there is an ethic of reading, a responsibility in how we read, a commitment that is both political and private in the act of turning the pages and following the lines. And I believe that sometimes, beyond the author's intentions and beyond the reader's hopes, a book can make us better and wiser' (x). Even as I recoil somewhat from Manguel's earnest tone, I agree.

The novelist and critic Tim Parks links subjectivity in interpreting and judging books with the role and status of critics:

It's now a commonplace that there is no 'correct' reading of any book: we all find something different in a novel. Yet little is said of particular readers and particular readings, and critics continue to offer interpretations they hope will be authoritative, even definitive. In this regard, I've been thinking how useful it might be if all of us 'professionals' were to put on record—some dedicated website, perhaps—a brief account of how we came to hold the views we do on books, or at least how we think we came to hold them. If each of us stated where we were coming from, perhaps some light could be thrown on our disagreements. (Parks)

Parks isolates a tension—a positive tension, I believe. There is not—there cannot be—a single definitive reading of a book. No critic can force me to interpret Helen Garner or Helen Demidenko/Darville or E.L. James in a particular way. But Parks goes on to suggest that professional critics continue to aim for 'authoritative, even definitive' interpretations. This juxtaposition resonates for me: although I acknowledge—indeed, embrace—the subjectivity of my reading, I nevertheless aim for the authoritative. In acknowledging the subjectivity of my interpretation of a book, I logically reject a definitive view. And yet, Parks is right: I *aim* for the definitive even while understanding, explicitly as well as implicitly, that I am reaching for *my* definitive rather than a universal definitive.

As Ley has written, 'to criticise something is inevitably to assume a position of intellectual mastery' (*The Critic* 2). I agree: as a book critic, I judge books against standards of excellence, or at least 'excellence' as I define it. The fact that I do so on my own terms does not alter the elitism I embrace (if anything, a personal elitism is the most arrogant elitism of all). As I noted at the beginning of this essay, I see the writing of an average novel as an achievement—but 'achievement', here, does not equal 'excellence'.

Haigh argues that book criticism should have 'the courage of its elitism' (11). While I agree, to defend elitism can mean any number of things. It does not, for example, presuppose a particular view about the importance of the western canon. The canon wars—or the 'canon brawl', as Lee Morrissey niftily put it (Hayes 225)—remain unwon, and unwinnable. A critic's relationship to the canon is personal. As already noted, I agree with Parks that critics aim for the authoritative, which is one reason why I have an ingrained suspicion of the canon. I do not cede my judgment to an official list of 'great books', not only because so many of those books are written by dead white blokes but because a critic's elitism is an individualistic act.

All that said, my wider response to the canon (and the canon wars) is not purely that of critic but is complicated by other roles I hold. I am also, for example, an academic in an English department, teaching students, contributing to curriculum development, and contemplating the capacity of some participants in the canon wars to 'allow questions about how to achieve equal recognition in a democratic society to spill into questions about what constitutes literary value' (Hayes 228). I am also a writer of fiction, and my approach to reading, especially in my youth and early adulthood, finds common ground with Saul Bellow: 'My tastes and habits were those of a writer. I preferred to read poetry on my own without the benefit of lectures on the caesura' (14). A detailed examination of the writer-critic and the 'pure' critic is beyond this essay's scope, but all critics possess a distinct set of biases and preoccupations.

As the Australian literary (and arts) community is currently aware, what is—and what is not—'excellent' is politically charged and contestable. Does a Nespresso machine make excellent coffee? Are Golden Retrievers excellent dogs? Is George Brandis an excellent politician? Or Mitch Fifield? Am I an excellent critic? In all cases, it depends on how you define 'excellent'. For me, excellence means that a book succeeds superbly and consistently on its own terms. As Updike advises, 'Try to understand what the author wished to do, and do not blame him for not achieving what he did not attempt' (Updike xvi-xvii; Dale). Bennie refers to M.H. Abrams, who contrasts an 'impressionistic' approach and a 'judicial' approach to criticism (Bennie 19-20; Abrams 51). I find such delineated approaches partially useful but ultimately unsatisfactory. And as Bennie notes, 'implicit in both models is the idea that the work of art is an autonomous object the sits ... independent of its cultural context' (21).

I do not use a checklist to pass judgment on a novel. Rather, I weigh a shifting combination of multiple factors. For me, an 'excellent' work of fiction leaves a record of its presence, like a brand, like a scar. As already noted, most books I read are not 'excellent'. But that does not mean they are necessarily absolute failures, open to ridicule and to a contemptuous, aggressive, superior tone. Here, the discussion drifts back towards the 'soft

versus snark' dichotomy I have attempted—unsuccessfully—to avoid. As Goldsworthy does, I distinguish 'certain sorts of negative or even just searching criticism' from 'the sort of hatchet job that seems to have been written mainly for the self-entertainment of the reviewer, if not for more base motives'. The difference, for me, is in the tone adopted and in an intent that shifts from constructive to gratuitous and exhibitionist (Bennie 16).

While the hatchet job review is by no means a purely Aussie phenomenon, Australians arts culture has enough of a history of them for Angela Bennie to compile the best—or is that worst?—of them in *Crème de la Phlegm: Unforgettable Australian Reviews*. Bennie's selections, coming after her deeply thoughtful contextual essay, run from the 1950s to the 2010s, and include books, theatre, film and visual art. Fittingly, Bennie's selection opens with a review in which poet A.D. Hope calls Patrick White's *The Tree of Man* 'pretentious and illiterate verbal sludge' (Hope 73). That line—the review's final phrase—resonates still, even as the detail of the rest of the review has long faded. It is, for example, the phrase that makes it into Elizabeth Webby's entry on Patrick White in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, accompanied by Webby's observation that 'White never forgot or forgave this, and remained wary of academics for the rest of his life.'

A more recent example of snark is Michael Hofmann's unpleasant, aggressive 'look at me' review of Richard Flanagan's Booker Prize-winning novel *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*:

The book was described as having gone through many drafts, with Flanagan using those that didn't make it to 'light the barbie'. I can't help thinking this wasn't the right one to spare. (Hofmann)

Hofmann's review inspired an equally unpleasant, aggressive, 'look at me' response from A.C. Grayling, the chair of the 2014, Booker Prize: 'Whatever construction one places on Michael Hofmann's review of Richard Flanagan's *The Narrow Road of the Deep North*, it is obvious it was written on a bad haemorrhoid day' (Grayling). It seems to me that Flanagan's book is superfluous to this exchange of insults.

Richard Flanagan is an author who seems to attract more than his fair share of snark. The critic Peter Craven, in his review of Flanagan's 2001 novel *Gould's Book of Fish*, said, 'It is, however, a monstrosity of a book' (385). Elsewhere, Craven defends the principle of the negative review: 'there should be no objection to their being savage' (Goldsworthy). I respectfully disagree, but I cannot offer 'evidence' to 'prove' my point. Craven's review argues that *Gould's Book of Fish* shows hints of its potential, but that it is sloppy and lacks drama (Craven 384-5; Bennie 26-8). I happen to disagree, but that hardly matters. It is Craven's tone rather than his assessment of Flanagan's book that I disfavour, because it exalts

provocation, as entertainment as well as a critical stance. That said, a poorly constructed positive review can equally put a critic on the wrong sort of pedestal: 'Be awed at how learned, deep and downright smart I am to recognise that *The Tree of Man* is a truly great book.'

I do not suggest that a fiercely critical response is always unacceptable. At times, a critic's denunciation can stem from serious ethical or political objections. One example of this is Stella Clarke's review of my novel *Figurehead* (2009) in *Australian Literary Review*. *Figurehead* attempts a satirical reading of modern Cambodian and Cambodian-global politics, dominated by the murderous Khmer Rouge regime (1975-9). Clarke begins by saying, 'It's just not clear what new layer of absurdity Allington hopes to have added', and ends by suggesting that I leave the writing of novels 'to writers who think that people's lives actually matter' (20). I do not selectively quote Clarke to endorse her criticism—unsurprisingly, I see it differently—or to belatedly argue back. I do so to acknowledge the legitimacy of a reader response that rejects not merely the product of a creative endeavour but its very motivations. If Clarke believes I adopt a shoddy attitude to the importance of human suffering, she cannot possibly respond any way but personally. Also legitimate is George Burchett's response to *Figurehead*, given that one of the novel's central characters, Ted Whittlemore, is inspired by Burchett's father, the leftist journalist Wilfred Burchett. From my author's perspective, 'Ted Whittlemore' is not 'Wilfred Burchett' renamed—in other words, *Figurehead* is not a biography in disguise. But it would be disingenuous of me to imagine that a family member might accept such a disclaimer.

Nonetheless, I see these examples as the exception to the rule. In any case, there is no particular need for me to find common ground with Hope, Hoffman or Craven—each to their own. But a delineated reading of strongly negative reviews sometimes reveals elements of the hatchet job but also elements of constructive criticism. For example, while I read *The Tree of Man* differently to Hope, I am drawn to his sceptical comments about 'the mythical Great Australian Novel' and his recognition that *The Tree of Man* is 'the story of the simple': 'In spite of some serious defects of manner, he really has, as his publishers claim, one essential of the great novelist: the ability to create real people and a real world for them to live in' (70). Hope's prose possesses a startling energy, his sentences a capacity to dig deep. Still, he remains responsible for the line in the review that most endures, a disrespectful and lazy slap.

Similarly, part of Hoffman's irritation appears to be directed at the critical reception Flanagan's *The Narrow Road of the Deep North* has enjoyed. He complains that 'some reviewers reached for their Tolstoy; others forbade any comparisons at all', a collective response he sees as akin to 'watching tourists hoaxed by polystyrene'. While I do not agree with Hoffman that the novel was 'almost universally adored', I do share some frustration about the

critical response. But I believe Hoffman does an imperfect book a disservice by making it somehow responsible for the praise it received. In doing so, he misses an opportunity to engage more constructively with these more positive critical responses, which are not themselves identical.

Given that this discussion has dwelled on the tone and language of book criticism, here I draw on four of my published reviews to offer representative examples of my commingled tempered praise and tempered criticism. All four reviews appeared in Saturday editions the *Adelaide Advertiser*, a Murdoch-owned daily tabloid, and each was between 500 and 540 words in length. The first three reviews I refer to here are broadly positive, while the fourth—on Tim Winton’s *Eyrie*—is broadly negative. I offer these examples, albeit briefly, because a discussion of tone seems incomplete without them. However, I do so mindful that quoting myself is a tiresome exercise best avoided.

In a review of Thomas Keneally’s 2012 novel *The Daughters of Mars*, about Australian nurses in World War I, I argue that,

At times, history weighs heavily upon the book, as if there is a checklist of key events, themes and places that the story must accommodate and explain—including everything from conscientious objection to dodgy military commanders. Keneally writes insightfully about courtship in war, and yet the men Sally and Naomi fall in love with are only moderately interesting characters, and their periodic presence saps a little of the story’s momentum. The novel’s ending, too, falls slightly flat. (Allington, ‘*Daughters*’)

The modulated criticism is deliberate: I precisely mean ‘only moderately interesting characters’ rather than ‘dull as dishwater’; I precisely mean ‘falls slightly flat’ rather than ‘is utterly tedious’. Despite the problems inherent in turning history into historical fiction—problems hardly unique to Keneally—I admire Keneally’s relentlessly enthusiastic approach to telling historical tales through fiction, and, in this particular novel, his desire, albeit somewhat strained, to both mark the contribution of nurses to the war effort and to remind readers that war is not noble. *The Daughters of Mars* is not a great book—or even close to a great book—but it succeeds, to a point, on its own terms.

My review of Michelle de Kretser’s Miles Franklin Literary Award-winning novel *Questions of Travel* (2012) describes a book that is not uniformly brilliant but that contains brilliant passages:

De Kretser sets the story’s foundations slowly—the novel is one-third over before it comes fully to life—but from this unpromising beginning emerges startlingly subtle observations on the human spirit and passages of superb, stinging prose. (Allington, ‘*Questions*’)

The long slow opening, roughly one-third of a 500-page book, is a significant flaw, but it does not invalidate the 'devastating and beautifully constructed ending' (Allington, 'Questions') Similarly, although the story sometimes slips 'towards over-explanation of ideas' and has 'thematic scaffolding that sometimes pokes through', at other times de Kretser demonstrates a heightened ability to engage with deeply political issues and moments.

In my largely positive review of Nicholas Rothwell's novel, *Belomor*—or at least I take it to be a novel—I suggest that the story is 'packed full of deep—sometimes unfathomable—contemplations'. This sounds a little—even to me, reading it back—as if I am straining for a way to assess a book I did not understand. My point, however, is that the novel affected me in the way few works of fiction do: it entirely disrupted my contemplation of the world. As my review puts it,

Belomor is exhilarating, challenging and draining. It's an odd book, too, but that's to Rothwell's credit, for he is a writer who interprets Australia and the world in startling and original ways. The story's final pages are slightly less enthralling than the rest of the book but that's perhaps because conventional books come with certain in-built restrictions. The existence of a final page, a final sentence, presupposes some sort of climax, but *Belomor* would be better suited to looping back and beginning all over again. (Allington, 'Belomor')

My reviews of Keneally's *The Daughters of Mars*, de Kretser's *Questions of Travel* and Rothwell's *Belomor* all contain tempered praise mixed with tempered criticism. If they all conform to the description of 'compliment sandwich', so be it: each book, in different ways, contains elements worth applauding, and I see no particular need to avoid a form.

It is also possible to write a mainly negative review—as I did with Tim Winton's novel *Eyrie*—without suggesting that a book has no redeeming qualities and without trying to assault the author on the page, as if doing so is the only way to demonstrate how attuned my critical faculties are: 'Watch me do a number on the revered author of *Cloudstreet*'. My review of *Eyrie* includes elements of praise, calling it 'a tense and at times gripping story about lives gone askew, individuals losing control and the vexing challenges of surviving, rebuilding and pushing on' (Allington, 'Eyrie'). Indeed, the novel does have moments that succeed, moments to savour, even if the book itself, in my view, is laboured. The juxtaposition of positives and negatives that follows in my appraisal is a conscious and sincere attempt to sift through positives and negatives. I argue that the dysfunction of Keeley, the central character, sometimes 'seems ratcheted up and repetitive, as if designed to ensure that readers cannot miss the point' (Allington, 'Eyrie'). I suggest that the story under-explores two key women characters. I argue that

Some themes, including domestic violence, class, redemption, the effects of childhood events on adult lives, and the competing claims of nature and progress, sometimes—only sometimes—sit awkwardly on the page, as if slightly abstracted from the characters.

I conclude that *Eyrie* feels incomplete (the ending is rushed) and yet that the book (like so many contemporary novels) is too long. As well as using the qualifier 'only sometimes', I make several positive comments about the novel, including that '*Eyrie* contains resonant moments and memorable characters'. The descriptions 'resonant' and 'memorable' are words that, as a critic, I no doubt overuse—Goldsworthy's reference to 'Book Review Bingo card', featuring overused terms in criticism, is embarrassingly apt here. Nonetheless, I prefer familiar language to employing a rarefied, coded vocabulary that excludes non-specialists. Some of the themes present in *Eyrie*—especially domestic violence, class, and the competing claims of nature and progress—are critical issues in contemporary Australia. It is worth wrestling constructively, rather than contemptuously, with Winton when he does readers the courtesy of wrestling with the world.

To this point, I have advocated a personal approach to literature that begins with my foundational philosophy as a critic, that it is an achievement to write a reasonably good novel or short story. Judging books one at a time, I stand by this approach. But I end this essay by speaking back, and complicating, my conclusions.

Although I stand by my 'glass half full approach' to reviewing, I am conscious that my reviews contain considered but instant judgments. But a critic's opinion of a book—as with that any other reader—can change over time. The reader changes, as does the status of a book itself, moving from infancy into a long adulthood. A critic writes in the immediate moment before or just after publication, whereas it can take years or decades for a book's legacy to become apparent. Some books, whatever their initial reception, do not warrant re-reading. They are fixed in the moment of first reading, like a chalk drawing on a pavement. But other books have reputations that will grow or shrink in time. For example, I recently revisited Charlotte Wood's Stella Prize-winning novel, *The Natural Way of Things* (2015), a book I did not review. I appreciated the book on my first reading of it, but also found myself sometimes unconvinced by the mix of realism and allegory Wood employs. But on a later re-reading of the novel—which I undertook, in part, to satisfy a nagging sense that I may have missed the point—I became more convinced by the removed-from-the-world setting Wood has employed to tackle the theme of misogyny.

In contrast, I think a little less of Tom Keneally's *The Daughters of Mars* than when I first reviewed it. But in probing why this is so, I find myself drawing away from *The Daughters of Mars* in isolation, instead placing it amongst various similar historically-themed Keneally novels—and

nodding again at Brady's suggestion that he 'has always been a writer who mattered, even when he is writing too much too quickly'.

This leads to a more significant concern for me. If I shift from assessing novels on an individual basis to take a panoramic, retrospective and collective view, I feel less comfortable about a landscape littered with tempered praise. Although I still, more or less, endorse each individual review as written, 'pretty good' is culturally more palatable applied to one book than it is to many years or to a library of books.

This bringing together of works can often have a dulling effect. For example, the placing together several decades of snarky reviews in *Crème de la Phlegm*, for me, is to the detriment of each individual review. Collectively, their impact—their passion, their anger, their outrage at the failures the critics see before them—quickly become dulled and repetitive, even though an individual review removed from the collection—say A.D. Hope on Patrick White—still fizzes.

I see no solution to this problem of so much 'good' fiction and so little 'great' fiction. Indeed, to call it a 'problem' is not quite right. It registers for me more as a regret, as a nagging sense of opportunities lost, and perhaps as a reflection of a cultural landscape that wrestles with definitions of 'excellence', for political as well as artistic reasons, but that does always stop to recognise that the attainment of excellence is genuinely rare.

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Notes

[1] Disclosure: I serve on the board of *Australian Book Review*.

[2] For one recent Australian-tinged foray into this longer history, see Ley, *The Critic in the Modern World* (2014).

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What is the Western Canon Good For?

By **Adam Kotsko**

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I am in the midst of my sixth year of teaching at Shimer College, a small liberal arts school in the Great Books tradition. This tradition, which began in the early 20th century in response to the perception that higher education was becoming too specialised, starts from the premise that every college student should engage with primary texts of enduring importance. A Great Books education is a broadly humanistic one, aimed at inducting students into the 'Great Conversation'.

In many ways, it is a very optimistic pedagogical model, throwing students into the deep end without textbooks or background lectures, on the assumption that nothing human is foreign to them. Hence they will be able to make at least some productive headway with exemplary products of human thought. It has also tended to be a deeply conservative pedagogical model, reifying the 'canon' of the Western Tradition—the intellectual trajectory that postcolonial theorists have lampooned as stretching 'from Plato to NATO'. The best-known Great Books school is St. John's College, where students read great texts from the Greeks forward, in chronological order, meaning that they do not encounter a single text by a woman until late in their career.

A colleague of mine calls Shimer's program 'Reformed Great Books', meaning that we make room for more contemporary and diverse texts in our curriculum. Unlike the St. John's program, the Shimer curriculum is divided into three broad disciplines—Humanities, Natural Sciences, and Social Sciences—and does not necessarily proceed in chronological order, even within a single course. There is one exception, however: in our senior capstone course, which is a two-semester sequence every student must take in their final year, we aim to provide a broad view of the Western tradition. Though many Great Books programs do something like this in the first year, we believe that students will be in a better position to engage with big questions and themes after they have completed the more discipline-specific sequences.

While Shimer is very liberal in the context of Great Books schools, its curriculum remains fairly conservative. That has become an increasing point of contention with our students, particularly since we have been attracting a much more diverse student body in recent years. Why should those students not have the opportunity to engage with more texts that reflect

their own experience? Why should they continually have to entertain the perspective of white straight males, while white straight male students so seldom have to do the reverse? More broadly, why should they have to spend their college career working through a tradition that has been used to legitimate patriarchy, racism, and imperialism?

As the most traditional of our offerings, the senior capstone has come in for the greatest criticism on this front. Why should students spend their final year reconstructing the conventional narrative of 'the West', running from the Ancient Near East, through Greece, Rome, medieval Christianity, and modern Europe? That is a question I have been grappling with all summer, as I have been assigned to teach an 'experimental' version of the capstone course, one that reflects student concerns while still being recognisable as the same course.

The first half of the sequence, which focuses on ancient and medieval sources, is a particularly challenging one from this perspective. Aside from highlighting texts by women where available, I have tried to address student concerns by placing much greater emphasis on Islam as an integral part of the broad debate that grows out of the intersection of monotheistic religion and the Greek philosophical tradition. I have also added contemporary works of scholarship that themselves count as 'primary sources', with a preferential option for women—particularly women who aren't writing solely on 'women's issues'. And more generally, I have sought to highlight conflict and contingency in the tradition, dispelling the myth that the trajectory from Homer to the Hubble Space Telescope is a predetermined narrative of ever greater progress and awesomeness.

Much of my preparatory work, however, has consisted of reviewing some of the Greatest of Great Books: *Gilgamesh*, the *Iliad*, the *Oresteia*, the *Aeneid*, the *Divine Comedy*. And as a result, it has been a very happy summer for me. These books may not be Great in some absolute, reified sense, but they are clearly, well, *great*. They don't all reflect or even anticipate the values that we take to be self-evident today, but that very foreignness opens up the space for critical reflection.

Even more interesting to me, from a pedagogical perspective, is how many of the texts stage the advent of a new idea. Most striking for me was the *Oresteia*, which presents a narrative of the emergence of law and justice out of the cycle of vengeance, a narrative that is raw and intense and, in my view at least, ultimately convincing. From a different angle, one could read the *Aeneid* as an attempt to legitimate Rome's historical destiny, an attempt that ultimately fails as it cannot help but present the cruel reality of conquest. The *Aeneid* is obviously the story of the man who would found Rome, in accordance with prophecy and with the blessing of the gods, but it is also the story about how a stranger came to town, ruined Turnus's life, and ultimately murdered him for complaining about it.

In short, if we must have a canon, we could do much worse than the traditional Great Books of the Western World. They are not the end-all be-all, but they are very fruitful points of reference that have a proven track record of inspiring creative cultural development. I am glad to have the chance to work through them, and I hope I can convince my students that they should be glad as well.

But must we have a canon? I am inclined to answer yes. Part of that stems from my personal background of being raised in a conservative Christian community. For many people, such communities are the strongest possible argument *against* the need for an authoritative canon: doesn't the Bible justify the most retrograde positions, which are blindly followed as God's word? In my experience, however, that's not how it works. What the Bible says is never simply the last word, because the Bible is a complex and heterogeneous document. Even if one presupposes that it is teaching a consistent message, that message is far from self-evident. And that means that the Bible is effectively *not* a repository of final answers, but a required reference point for argument and debate—a reference point that gives even the most marginal position an entry point into the conversation and a claim to attention and provisional legitimacy.

Now I study rather than practice religion, and my investigation of scriptural traditions in all of the great monotheistic religions shows the same pattern: far from the parodied view according to which the fundamentalist robotically does whatever is written down in scripture, the scriptural canon is *always* the starting point for reasoned deliberation, even in communities that want to believe that they are literally following scripture. And because no scriptural canon is or can be entirely self-consistent, there is always room for creativity and change. For that reason, I have always maintained that I would much rather debate with even the most hardened Christian fundamentalist than with someone like Richard Dawkins. The fundamentalists' loyalty to a complex and ambiguous scriptural canon means that I would have at least a chance of finding a way to change their minds, whereas Dawkins' belief that he has direct access to reason and truth leaves much less room for hope.

Obviously the Great Books are not a canon in the same sense as the Bible or the Qur'an are canons. A shared cultural tradition functions differently from a shared religious or legal tradition. Yet there is a similarity in that a cultural tradition promises to provide everyone with grounds to be taken seriously as a part of the conversation. This feature explains the enduring appeal of the Great Books for class-aspirational auto-didacts. I count myself in that group: as an intellectually inclined son of working-class parents, I loved the idea that there was a list of books that could grant me credibility and respectability (and as a result, I looked long and hard at St. John's when applying to college). The Great Books collection put out by Encyclopedia Britannica had a similar audience in mind when it was

released, as it was believed that working people could study and discuss the Western canon in their free time and enjoy at least some of the benefits of higher education.

This association between the classics and the working class is far from new. Library records from the Industrial Revolution reveal that where the wealthy checked out what we might call 'bestsellers', working class patrons focused on the classics. The Soviet Union took pains to make the tradition of Russian classics available to the masses (somewhat paradoxically, given the aristocratic and religious attitudes on display in most of that literature), and in the West, the Penguin Classics provided a more capitalist spin on the same goal.

The working class affinity for the classics is even inscribed directly into the tradition of great literature itself, in Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*. Reading the book when I was the same age as young Jude, I identified deeply with his naïve belief that he could open up a new life for himself by learning Greek verb conjugations—and I felt it deeply when the promise of the Great Books was shown to be a lie in his case. When he gets his letter of rejection from Oxford, it reveals that Oxford is not a place for those who love learning, but for the kind of person who goes to Oxford.

The contemporary American university faces the risk of the same kind of self-referential nihilism, where people are expected to go to college so that they will have gone to college (and become friends with the type of people who will have gone to college). In the wake of the 'canon wars', virtually no university has a clear answer to the question of what students are getting out of college aside from very expensive vocational training. Faculty could not agree on an expanded cultural canon that met the fully justified demands of groups that felt delegitimated from the outset by the traditional Western canon. The result is that college has become a grab bag with no shared points of reference. 'General education' requirements are a checklist that can be fulfilled by any number of courses, and the attempt to create some kind of shared cohort effect (through shared summer readings for incoming first-years, or interdisciplinary 'seminar'-style courses) often feel artificial and tacked on. If we ask what all this adds up to, the only answer is a vague gesture toward something called 'critical thinking', and of course no one can agree on what that means, either.

Compared to this directionless, content-free regime in American higher education, some cultural canon, *any* cultural canon would surely be preferable. Best of all, of course, would be a truly inclusive canon where no group would feel ignored and yet no group could ever feel completely at home—not so that we would finally have the *real* depository of all the answers, but so that we would have even more starting points for our most urgent debates.

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Had We but World Enough, and Time: A Response to Adam Kotsko

By **Nina Power**

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One question I can never quite accurately answer is the following: what is the precise relation between books and the history of the present? Just how far do ideas (progressive or otherwise) shape the politics and actions of humanity, such that we live forever in their aftermath? Hegel's owl of Minerva, perpetually taking flight at dusk, tells us that wisdom comes later, that thought and history are led by events. But we know that many thinkers, Hegel himself included, have done far more than simply reflect on things, but have actively contributed to the very way we conceive of the world, the very frameworks and concepts and terms we use to describe our lives—for better or (often) worse. The 'Canon' question seems to me to oscillate very delicately between two major poles: firstly, what Kotsko describes as the simple fact of the desirable 'greatness' of the canon (as pleasurable—if sometimes difficult—works of art, as exemplars of the capacity of the human mind and heart), and, secondly, as texts that *must* be read in order to better understand the shape of the past and present. The question of who gets to read these texts is always central: the ruling class who have a possessive relation to everything also and predictably have a possessive relation to art and culture, all the more so if they believe it justifies or invigorates their current tawdry practices—why admit that you a vile, greedy human being when you can pretend to be the modern-day reincarnation of a Roman leader or Greek god?

In the type of school attended by 93 percent of the population in Britain, the Classics are almost completely neglected. Educational reform in the 1960s, which involved the near-abolition of grammar schools where Greek and Latin were taught to a select few who passed the 11-plus exam, included the phasing out of such subjects as education became more and more geared towards the supposed needs of a technical and vocational economy and society. Yet for those who wanted to (or were expected to) enter the most elite institutions, a classical education was still a requirement. This could only be acquired at a cost at private schools where confidence was taught alongside the sorts of knowledge deemed to benefit future rulers. The Canon is always a class issue. It is an issue of envy and deliberate exclusion, of cultural capital and state-enforced ignorance. It is also historically, as Kotsko notes, a question of auto-didacticism and public libraries, of the time to read and the time to reflect, all of which are being destroyed and eroded by those who govern.

For those deemed to be minoritarian or marginal, even if these groups are factually globally very large—that is to say, women and people of colour—the Canon is also presumed to be distant and irrelevant, even though many great works of literature are themselves responses to the Canon, and/or attempts to expand or create new Canons (or anti-Canons). But do we need to read the Canon in order to understand the responses to it? Can we read Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) without reading Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847)? Frantz Fanon without Jean-Paul Sartre? Chinua Achebe without Joseph Conrad or William Butler Yeats? In an ideal world, with infinite time, one would read everything at once, dispensing with claims about beginnings and selections, primary and secondary, originals and responses, overturning geographical hierarchies and outdated claims to superiority. If today we read Kant and Hegel for their philosophical genius, when do we stop such that we can then turn to the critical literature that traces how Eurocentrism and damaging conceptions of race follow from their work just as much as our thinking about space, time and dialectics? Which of their ideas, in the end, has had more impact on the way the world is? I do not have a straightforward answer to this. All I can think is that we must understand why those we both admire and oppose make the arguments that they do, and that to refuse to read something for fear of being 'corrupted' or 'tainted' or because it is written by a dead white man may mean that we do not understand how it is that dead white men continue to hold all the power, especially when some of these dead white men are very much alive and powerful in their current zombie reincarnations.

Kotsko states that in his expanded course on the Canon he includes 'contemporary works of scholarship that themselves count as "primary sources," with a preferential option for women—particularly women who aren't writing solely on "women's issues.'" This seems to me to be something of an uncharacteristic slip in Kotsko's approach, celebrating only those works by women deemed not to be 'partial' or 'partisan'. Yet 'women's issues'—and what does Kotsko imagine here? Feminist criticism? Work that focuses on misogyny? That discusses female biology?—is hardly of minor interest to half of all humans, and should therefore be of interest to the other half too. A Canon that pertains to some fantasy of neutral masculine universality, even as it includes women and people of colour is still an exclusive endeavour: it makes an implicit claim that some topics (war? justice?) are more important than others (peace? childbirth?). What lies behind the construction of any Canon, whether classical or Biblical, postcolonial or philosophical, is perhaps a fear of structurelessness, a fear of the impossibility of having some kind of hold on an image of the world, the absence of a mirror. Kotsko suggests that any Canon is the starting point for 'reasoned deliberation', and I tend to agree, certainly in practice—we cannot carry out critique if we do not understand the parameters of an existing mode of thought. But again the question of the *time* we

have comes back to haunt me: reading for the vast majority of people will always be a random hodgepodge of material, not an imposed elite, structured classical education, whether Biblical or classical, or scientific etc. How do we make our way through texts that were not written for us but shape our lives in obscure ways? With vigilance, with empathy, with critique. We might begin by asking—what is it that the ruling class would prefer you didn't read? And why, exactly, is that?

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You Can Have Your Canon and Read It Too: A Response to Adam Kotsko

By **Ali Matsin**

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I began preparing my response to 'What is the Western Canon Good For?' by compiling a list of quotes, from Kotsko's essay, under 'Questionable' and 'Agreeable' headings. Based on this rather primitive data collection, I would have to agree with Kotsko's main argument for the preservation (of a version) of the Western canon—on my list there are 4 'Agreeable' versus 3 'Questionable' passages. Despite this evidence, however, I remain ultimately unconvinced by Kotsko's argument, and feel sceptical about the role of the Western canon in tertiary education.

Kotsko's strongest argument for granting a central place to a canon of Great Books in an education program is his view that 'many of the texts [associated, however loosely, with the Western canon] stage the advent of a new idea'. This is clearly the case with the two texts that he has cited, and the capacity for instigating 'a new idea' can also be seen in many other Great Books: in, for example, Stendhal's *Le Rouge et le Noir* (1831), which one could describe, after Jacques Rancière, as the novel—in both senses of the word—entry of the mundane into the literary; or in the poetry of Stéphane Mallarmé which, as Alain Badiou has it, is an important literary articulation of the idea of the event. So would it not be indeed beneficial to enshrine such thought-provoking texts in our curricula?

I also appreciate Kotsko's call for a 'truly inclusive canon', and agree with him that access to Great Books has provided, and continues to provide, working-class students with an intellectual form of resistance against socio-cultural hierarchies. I very much personally identify with Kotsko's self-description as a 'class-aspirational auto-didact', and I recall that studying George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) was one of the very few highlights of my otherwise miserable experience of attending a rough, patently underprivileged public high school in Brisbane. Great Books—irrespective of which particular works of literature are placed under this signifier—provide a space where the rich and the poor, the powerful and the marginalised, can participate, as equals, in the universal community of reading.

Reading over the last sentence of the above paragraph, I am alarmed by how easily I can mimic the discourse of liberal humanism. And it is due to my misgivings about this discourse, and regardless of the strengths of some of Kotsko's specific points, that I remain uncertain about his overall

argument. I am not as surprised as Kotsko seems to be about Soviet communists' enthusiasm for the likes of Tolstoy—as Lenin himself, and then Pierre Macherey *à la* Lenin, have very clearly shown, Tolstoy's works, *if read dialectically*, provide a radical perspective on the ruling ideologies of the author's society. But can this perspective come via a prism offered to us by a Great Books framework? Does approaching a novel by Tolstoy—or, come to that, a collection of digital essays by a contemporary queer woman of colour—with an emphasis on the work's Greatness and its canonical status help us read that work as a critique of ideology?

I very much doubt it. I suggest that for a reading to show the literary text to be—in Kotsko's own words— 'a complex and heterogeneous document', we must avoid liberal humanist ideology. I have already cited Macherey's excellent reading of Tolstoy. Louis Althusser's staunchly anti-humanist theory of art, the source of Macherey's method, is one avenue for reaching an understanding of literature, canonical or otherwise, which breaks with a simplistic interpretation that merely affirms ideological assumptions. *Le Rouge et le Noir*, for example, can very easily be valorised as the first modern realist novel, praised for its ethical messages regarding crime and desire, and so on. But does this approach challenge dominant bourgeois ideologies of either Stendhal's society or our own?

I'd like to argue that if we are to appreciate the complexity of a literary text and, precisely as Kotsko would rightly like us to, see the work of literature as something with the capacity for 'the advent of a new idea', then we need to break with regimes of praise, adulation and canon-worship. As many a Marxist literary scholar since Althusser has demonstrated, a work of literature can show us—and hence make it possible for us to resist— hegemonic ideology only if we see the work as a *failure* and not as a masterpiece, as an aesthetic deformity and not as a work of beauty.

This means that instead of reading, say, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as a powerful denunciation of communism, a celebration of the fortitude of individualistic desire and the like, we must highlight the novel's inability to represent the putative horrors of collectivised life beyond resorting to a highly speculative, far-fetched fantasy of state control and aesthetic deprivation. Instead of dwelling on the ugliness, drabness and oppressiveness of Winston Smith's world—and against Orwell's stated intentions and our own assumptions apropos of Orwell's supposed genius—we must focus on Orwell's inability to present us with a beautiful, colourful and liberating depiction of communism's other—capitalism.

A conclusion one could reach from this approach would be that, far from showing us how terribly dystopian an English socialism may appear, the novel tells us that capitalism, despite its ideological preoccupations with prosperity and pleasure, does not produce a suitably positive image worthy of literary representation. Capitalism's promises of joy, romance and

happiness remain abstract and unfathomable, while, ironically, great amorous passion—of the kind experienced by Winston and Julia—is possible in the supposedly joyless socialist setting of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

I could very happily continue with this oppositional reading of a truly great work of Western literature. I shall instead end my response to Kotsko's piece by saying that my reading of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, whatever one makes of its plausibility, is a genuine attempt at studying the novel with an eye to articulating a 'new idea'. And such an attempt could not be made under the aegis of a Great Books rubric. Books by Orwell, Stendhal, Tolstoy—and, yes, by Virginia Woolf, Toni Morrison and Salman Rushdie—should continue to be taught, but not as testaments to their authors' brilliance and the like (and preferably not in the pedagogic context of university subjects dedicated to the study of Great Books) but as imperfect, conflicted pieces of literary production. And why not teach these alongside other, wonderful new, obscure and underappreciated works with no claims to Greatness.

Swags, Plains and Cranes: A Response to Adam Kotsko

By **Michael Farrell**

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Rejecting the canon requires an amount of cultural capital. The Dadaists provide an example from a century ago. They created a place for themselves in the canon of movements, the canon of avant-gardes, although they are probably more likely to be referred to, institutionally, in an art context than a literary one. Their success/failure is perhaps linked to them being largely 'straight white males', but their poetics were pretty queer. The canon is an idea, not a law, or stone. It exists as a historical construct, which students of literature perhaps see as moribund, but literature and history are not the enemy. Perhaps we should be more worried about what are canonical subjects and why, and the othering of Literature as a subject. Loving books gets queerer all the time.

I was sympathetic to both of the main aspects of Adam Kotsko's text: of wanting to connect with students; and with his own story, and feeling, about the canon. He seems to have come up with good solutions to his own problem, but, as he indicates, how does what his students are learning connect with those in the rest of the U.S.? Should it? Could it? Kotsko doesn't mention the name of any subjects: framing seems to me to be crucial in engaging students.

I have been asked to give a response along the lines of queer and contemporary poetry: to a large extent this will be an Australianist's perspective also. I write as a poet, scholar, examiner, sometime supervisor, but not otherwise, currently, as a teacher. Although I have some experience in teaching literature, the subjects I have taught have been primarily, expressly, diverse and contemporary. The problem seems to be, how do we deal with history?

If we are interested in literature, or have a specific interest within literature, we have our own more or less static, more or less mobile, notions of the canon, or canons: regardless of whether they are part of curriculum or not. They function as a means of communication. In poetry terms that might mean we can talk about Shakespeare or Emily Dickinson, Banjo Paterson or Judith Wright, to someone outside our field, much in the way a poet might talk about O'Hara or Eliot or Plath when they meet poets outside the Anglosphere: the canon of translation. We might think of these as vernacular or counter canons, but as the names I just cited indicate, they are likely to overlap with what is taught, and, the popularity of a text puts pressure on its likelihood of being taught.

If we are inside the academy we also have a subjective sense of what's being taught: what we were taught as students, what we teach, what our friends teach at other universities. We know that, generally, poetry is taught as poems photocopied in a reader, whereas novelists are taught by the book. This convention counters the possibility of the canonical poetry book, and also effects the status of the author: arguably 'Five Bells' is more canonical than Kenneth Slessor. Someone like Wright becomes a symbol of the Australian canon, without too much attention being paid to her poems. Biography (iconology?) takes over, which helps the poems stay in print.

In terms of the classroom, I think it would be an interesting exercise for students to argue for chosen poems to join a broader, transnational, Western if you like, or Anglophone, canon. This would require thinking about teaching the poem outside its immediate context. It would emphasise the separation that exists, the different orders of global cultural capital, between local and British and North American literatures.

There seem to me to be several possibilities for a tradition-based, or historicised, teaching of Australian poetry. None of these need focus on Great Books or Great Authors necessarily or exclusively.

- 1) A comparative traditions/poetics model, of which the West might be one (but the West can be broken down further); Chinese and Japanese poetics, for example, are clearly influential on contemporary Australian poetry.
- 2) The Anglophone tradition. This makes any aspect of Greek literature not a founding aspect but one of translation (and dialectic and exchange). The foundation of course goes back to England: a story of diaspora and morphing.
- 3) A history of writing in Australia as land. Again, issues of (Indigenous) translation, including the colonial history of translation, arise.
- 4) Diaspora and exile as historical aspects of literature. There are many ancient examples that deal with this theme, as well as examples of exiled writers. This approach need not of course emphasise settler experience (though it does complicate 'settler', as the term 'settler' suggests choice), as many Indigenous texts are about displacement. David Unaipon mentions arrival in Australia, as if drawing on a cultural memory tens of thousands of years long.
- 5) Poetry of the Self/Other. Much (if not all?) poetry deals with this dialectic in some way, whether the context is romantic lyric, narrative, dramatic or epic. Poetry forms might be read as othering different forms (think of verse versus prose poetry, or concrete or visual poetry).
- 6) Histories of writing and reading are also possibilities. This would of course include writing on things other than paper. Histories of interpretation.

7) Canon-making; anthologising. This could include histories of departure and arrival: what texts used to be canonical, why aren't they now? When did such-and-such first become anthologised? The benefit of such a subject would be assignments which required students to make their own canons/anthologies, something that at more advanced levels might become the basis of their own teaching.

8) History of the status/popularity of poetry, which would not I think have to be a history of decline!

This is largely a fantasy of course. There are few opportunities to teach poetry as a subject: mostly poetry is paid attention for a week or two in a more general literary, or creative writing subject. Much of the above could be applied, or adapted, to teaching literature, or Australian literature subjects. I also wonder if a poetry subject is an ideal. Increasingly it seems to me that teaching poetics, broad or narrow, is a potentially productive option. Histories of poetics. Comparative poetics. The poetics of Australian literature. Can we talk about Australian poetics as an other to Western poetics? Can we talk about canon poetics? How might a canonical case study be read as exemplary of the canon, or, as exceptional? Poetics de-emphasises the author, and demotes narrative and theme: they become an aspect rather than the representative aspect. It sends a message: literature is art not stories. Poetics has the potential I think to provide a merger for literary study and creative writing. Poetics gives poetry a central role to play and makes its lack of commercial value irrelevant. Politicians, industry, news media: they all use poetics.

What about queer? Despite my editing *Out of the Box*, I have some resistance to the biographical model in a literary teaching context. We don't have the major gay and lesbian historical figures, associated with poetry, that the U.S. in particular has. But Australian poetry is as queer as any other national culture's! It deviates from English and North American poetry. It's about all sorts of non-normative attachments. Swags, plains and cranes. Crying rainbows in Martin Place! Queer is one way of approaching the limits of the canon. What queers the canon from without, from within? We can come up with a canon of queer poems if necessary (email me with or for suggestions); but to some extent I think queer wants to stay outside, wants not to be represented, wants not to be taught: or wants to undo teaching in some way. Queer cannot, I think, be made decorous: but neither, ideally, should the canon, or literature. Dada wasn't decorous either, but it became literature. Perhaps we need to stay alive to literature-as-an-other within literature, within the realm, or economy, of love.

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Canons: Indispensable and Disposable—A Response to Adam Kotsko

By **Simon During**

London Metropolitan University, UK

It has, of course, become very difficult to think about canons. Once relatively simple things—we just had them, they were just *there*—, from the seventies onwards they have become increasingly contentious and hard to get your head around.

They came under attack almost simultaneously from two different directions.

First, from marginalised groups who, demanding political, social and cultural emancipation, thought, rightly, that received canons did not sufficiently consecrate their own achievements and experiences, and, further, that these received canons protected white men's historical dominance. This kind of intervention need not imply a rejection of canonicity as such however. People belonging to marginalised 'identities' sometimes established new, more limited canons which expressed only their own group's achievements. Or they pushed for more representation of works from their own heritage inside broader, more universal canons.

Second, and more radically, canonicity came under attack from cultural populists who thought that what creative works are (or are not) great is just a matter of personal opinion, and (drawing on (a misreading of?) Pierre Bourdieu's work) that to recognise a small number of masterpieces as a canon is to shore up prestige or cultural capital for and from a privileged class-position.

So it is hard to deal with canonicity neutrally because it seems to be more a political debate between a conservative side (supporters of old-style canons) and a democratic side (those who reject canonicity as such or old-style canons at any rate) than something we can usefully reason about.

With one rather important exception. What seeds canonicity—i.e., judgments about what works are better or worse than others—is actually constitutive of the practices in which literature (or music or art or any creative work) are produced. Such judgments happen at the most basic and mundane moments of the creative process—for instance, when a writer jettisons a draft (of a phrase, of a line, of a sentence, of a paragraph, of a whole piece) because it doesn't quite jell, and starts another one. Qualitative judgments happen at a more general level too when those most

deeply engaged in a creative form intuitively recognise the power of some particular works or oeuvres, and in their own works begin to be shaped by them, not necessarily consciously. They happen too when readers or music lovers (say) begin to draw up lists of top tens etc. as a form of expressing their love for a genre or medium. And the patterns that appear from out of these various levels of judgement turn out not to be random or chaotic. There may be room for a great deal of individual disagreement (and often profoundly influential works are not later canonised) but within a particular field of collectively engaged works a rough consensus is always (I think) established about which are the best works, and which of them are especially great.

So canons of a kind are central or organic to creativity, not extraneous to it.

But all this does not much help Adam I think. He is wondering about what to teach in a curriculum in a conservative liberal-arts college. It is a pedagogical question. The canonical works of world literature that he is concerned with—*Gilgamesh*, *Orestes* and so on—never shared a tradition. They do not emerge from, or constitute, what I have just called a 'field of collectively engaged works'. Today, they turn up alongside one another in, and only in, academic curricula, and indeed this kind of list was developed as a result of early twentieth-century debates in the US about the future of liberal-arts pedagogy during the period when it was breaking with pedagogies based on teaching Latin and Greek. So the organic or constitutive canonicity that I have just pointed to does not apply to it. This is indeed one problem with the 'world literature' concept more widely: it is invented at a distance from its objects, and these days, as I say, almost always for pedagogical ends.

So I would agree with Adam's response to his situation—by which I mean his decision to finesse Shimer College's official, founding philosophy so as to meet his students' actual needs. As I suspect we all know, what really counts in the classroom is vibrant communication between teacher and students—that is where learning happens. This is, however, hard to achieve, and you do not get there by worrying about canonicity and, especially by worrying about forced and artificial arrangements of masterpieces within a universal, a-historical, abstract cultural heritage. You get there by matching your particular capabilities and interests as a teacher to your student's particular capabilities and interests. And, I'd suggest that that is, in fact, more easily done by tapping into hierarchised fields of collectively engaged works as they currently exist outside the academy. Indeed, so long as the decline of literary interest and subjectivity can be brushed aside, we just might be able to posit a canon something like F.R. Leavis's 'great tradition', namely a body of great works that can pass as organically constituting the collectively engaged field we call 'English literature' itself. That, I think, marks the far limits of what is possible for an effective pedagogy based on an extensive canon.

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Innumerable Centres of Culture: A Response to Adam Kotsko

By **Adrian Martin**

Monash University, Australia

In June 2016, I received an email on behalf of the scarily named 'BBC Culture' department in the UK. It was an invitation to yet another canon-making poll: this time, 'the greatest films of the 21st century'. As usual, I submitted to the demand, and spent a total of around five minutes dashing off a list of ten titles from the top of my head; as usual, I was annoyed to see the dull, highly publicised consensus tabulation that emerged a month later. And then the inevitable Internet discussions began: corroborations, denunciations, a 'counter-poll' established ...

I do not take canons, in any of the arts, terribly seriously. I can see that many people have an evident drive toward contributing to them, and/or reviewing the result; and I can understand why all manner of institutions—museums, government funding agencies, cinémathèques, publishers, television stations, and the like—have a use for them, to help set their decision-making priorities (what to subsidise, what to program, what to cover, etc.). But all canons are erected on shifting sand (time will rearrange them soon enough), and even that sand can be pretty ersatz: there is always too much excluded from view, from consideration, before the individual lists even begin to be formulated.

But the individual lists, finally, are the only thing in this process that I enjoy, or believe in: some snapshot (however kooky) of a subjective sensibility, a person arranging a hodgepodge from what Roland Barthes once rightly called 'the innumerable centres of culture'. Because innumerable they surely are, and must remain: whenever I compose one of these lists, my mind races to grab at some certified movie classic, a short avant-garde experiment, a trashy comedy, a completely obscure or unknown gem, a film nobody else but myself likes ... and so on.

In this sense, the best lists can be provocative, polemical, political—inspiring or maddening. Canons, on the contrary, are invariably dreary and conformist. The filmmaker Bertrand Tavernier expressed this well: 'Too many beautiful and important films are missing, and they leave out the texture, the richness and life of cinema by not including all those "imperfect" films which are more meaningful and alive than frozen, dated "classics"'.¹

When I read Adam Kotsko's text, as smart and logical as it is, I am reminded once more of my deep antipathy toward a culture—Australia's, formed in the shadow of Mother England—that bestows such a special privilege on The Literary, literature as the great repository of human values, Great Works, grand traditions, and the like. Only in literature can anyone get away with trotting out the litany of Canonical Masterworks that any citizen should reasonably become familiar with: Homer, Shakespeare, Chaucer, Dante ... Try it with virtually any other art form or medium, and the exercise quickly breaks down: what is the special music, chosen from across the history of the world, that we all must hear, must know? The painting? The theatre? The design? The radio? The closer an art's or medium's invention comes to our present, the more patently absurd the very notion becomes.

Western Literature depends on its long, historic time span to reinforce the central, justifying argument for maintaining a canon. Kotsko, in his fashion, rehearses it: if we want to understand the West itself, the attitudes and ideas that 'formed us', we need to know those founding works of Homer et al. They are the works that set the templates of narrative, of language, of imagination! But let's now switch to cinema. What are the films that we can persuasively say are not merely classics in themselves, but also formed our present culture, our world? Charlie Chaplin and/or Buster Keaton? The Fritz Lang of *Metropolis* (1927) and *M* (1931)? D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* (1915)? Welles' *Citizen Kane* (1941)? Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958)? I cannot answer in the affirmative, because I am of the conviction that, to study, explore and appreciate the genres, modes, elements and aesthetics of world cinema, you can—and should—start absolutely anywhere, with any film. Just the way that individuals, on their hopefully unpredictable paths, discover one film and then another ...

When I rattled off a list of those institutions with vested interests in the canons of art, I left out the university. Yet it is the institution of tertiary-level teaching that Kotsko's argument fundamentally rests upon. I often think we mystify this context with appeals to Great Traditions and whatnot. The fact is that most young students, kids in their late teens or early 20s, are not (yet) terribly concerned about establishing the 'origins of Western culture'—they're more interested in the immediate experience of what they can discover, connect up and 'network' for themselves. What some of them—especially those of middle class-or-upward background—are dimly aware of, however, is that university is meant as their veritable finishing school, where they will pick up just enough of the good old cultural capital of their forebears to navigate job interviews, dinner parties, and the like. You don't have to be an expert in Bourdieu to see that this is how a certain social machine works.

The last time I taught at a university, I was facing certain young students already half-formed, at the age of 18, within soirées of family and friends,

by 'Criterion DVD Nights': they knew some European masterpieces, some Old Hollywood classics. And they already had deeply ingrained prejudices against so many things: Jerry Lewis comedies, Brian De Palma thrillers, 'wanky' experimental films ... In this scenario, Criterion (a company that has been phenomenally, horrifyingly successful in shaping the film taste of a new generation) has taken over the role of any 'Great Books' curriculum of yesteryear. In this context, the role of education (at any level) should not be to confirm such citadels of taste, but to question, undermine and smash them. This is one of many reasons why I love the cinema, because that possibility of subversion is still there, and still alive.

Hold your Fire: Utility, Play, and the Western Canon—A Response to Adam Kotsko

By **Kate Flaherty**

Monash University, Australia

The operative concept in Adam Kotsko's essay 'What is the Western Canon Good For?' is use. In his thought-provoking piece, it is axiomatic that an evaluation of the 'Western Canon' should scrutinise the purposes, particularly educational purposes, to which it is put. This points to the fact that a canon exists as an application of a diverse set of texts toward a particular, usually educational, end; an end which the texts' authors have rarely envisaged. While *King Lear* or *To the Lighthouse* can appear free of their histories of application, a canon cannot because grouping texts instantiates a discourse of use. Selection, involves criteria. Every curriculum is a canon. Every reading list is a canon. As such, canons stimulate conversation differently to how an individual text can because they make us read texts, yes, critically, and in relation to each other. The scale of the canon and diversity of its uses over time will be echoed in the scope of the discussion it can stimulate. In my response I will focus on a particular textual form that underscores this discourse of use because it anticipates use in a very deliberate way: the dramatic text. This will point to the hospitable space of play which the existence of a canon—particularly a canon *used* to make meaning over a long period of time and across a wide range of contexts—can generate.

My area of expertise is drama, specifically early modern drama. I love teaching dramatic texts because they lay open the reading process; they make urgent the task of interpretation while they make obvious the plurality of interpretative possibilities. They do this because they are written to be used for making plays. The performer must choose how to speak his or her lines. If 'What a piece of work is a man?' is directed to the sky, it means something different to when Hamlet asks it, with a wry smile, of a woman in the front row. And yet the canon of documents recognised as *Hamlet* makes available both of these and many more interpretative uses. Then, if we zoom out on uses of the Hamlet canon itself, we are immediately engaged in a lively and complex discourse of uses. Productions of *Hamlet* have valorised the protagonist's misogynistic sentiments, others have underscored Ophelia's intelligence and mistreatment; some have made it into a domestic tragedy, others have exploited its scope as a political drama. Readings of *Hamlet* incubated psychoanalytic theory and were later used to critique it. That there is a Hamlet canon is given. The question of what legitimately belongs to it has been the stimulant for a four-hundred-

year-long conversation that spans peoples, disciplines, and media. I want in.

Adam makes the point that a possible detraction of the 'Western Canon' for pedagogical purposes is the history of its *use* to legitimate patriarchy, racism and imperialism. But, for me, this is precisely why canonical texts should be prescribed for study by those whose experiences have not been understood as represented by them. How can reductionistic applications of these complex texts be challenged except by highly skilled readers whose values and life experience offer resistance to them? In this sense, recognised canonical texts are a large, ready-made stage. A danger more dire than expecting students to learn to read them is precluding students from the playing space through a scholarly culture in which reading is about having your local experiences, preferences, and prejudices affirmed.

I, like Adam, come from a working class family and a conservative Christian upbringing. Both my father and I were out at work by the age of thirteen; the major differences being that I was not driven by hunger and could continue at school. One day my English teacher introduced the names 'Austen' and 'Bronte' with a brief précis of their contributions to literature. I decided that, after my shift that evening, I would take my wage to the bookshop. The monotonous hours were varied by the task of deciding which one to buy: the one called *Pride and Prejudice* (I had it written on my hand) or the one called *Jane Eyre*? What joy to discover that I could easily afford both! Thank you 'Signet Classics'. The joy of affording to own these books was amplified by the joy of reading them. They were strange and difficult. They revealed experiences that were nothing like my own in sentences that I had to read several times. But they let me read them anyway. They didn't ask what my parents did, what suburb I came from or what my religious beliefs were. The answers to all of these questions, as I later discovered, had potential to disqualify me from the official conversation about literature. The day may still come when they do. But that day, for \$3, I was in the door of the playhouse. I couldn't believe my luck.

The leap from the personal anecdote to the theatre is deliberate. Access is my central motif and within it is a paradox. In the performance space for which Shakespeare wrote most of his plays, the cheapest tickets got you closest to the stage. The more expensive gallery tickets bought you the privilege of being seen to be there. While we are all alive to the critique of Western Canon for having been used to propagate systematic oppressions, do we ever stop to consider the millions of maverick learners for whom it has provided the only available entry point into a discourse bigger and more varied than their own experience? In the prison cell? In the hospital? At home caring for children? This kind of use is difficult to quantify. In it, however, the very ubiquity of what we call 'canonical' texts *is* their utility for democratising access to diverse legacies of cultural understanding. I have often observed that the most aggressive advocates for scrapping canonical

texts from school and university curricula are those for whom introduction to the canon has been an automatic rite of passage; second, third, or fourth-generation university graduates. For the rest of us, arriving at university to be informed that we came in by the wrong door can be a deeply disheartening experience. Now, as a tertiary educator myself, I want all of my students to recognise the continuities between what they have already loved and learnt about literature and the advanced skills and knowledge that a university training can impart.

For undergraduate studies in English I have always advocated a compulsory component which includes authors that any popular consensus of Anglophone literary greatness would generate. I advocate this not because I own this 'canon' but because I can't. It is a given cultural entity bigger than my best judgment about what is 'important' for people to read. If diversity is a criterion let it be said that the Western Canon does contain heterogenous viewpoints. How 'white' was Homer? Was Shakespeare 'straight'? Was George Eliot 'male'? We have to exert anachronistic categories to construe as homogenous the complexity of lived experience represented in this dynamic grouping of texts. It would be a retrograde step, having had access to the huge thought-domain (playhouse?) that the canon-concept demarcates, to decide that new entrants don't require it. Systematic erasure of the big names from an English literary studies curriculum implies a proprietorship to which I do not feel entitled. Even more sinister, however, is a repopulation of the curriculum with texts that 'better reflect *our* students' experiences'. What are my students' experiences? I don't presume to know. At the Australian National University we educate students from a wide array of racial, religious and socio-economic backgrounds. It would be deeply misguided and condescending to attempt build a curriculum (read 'canon') around texts that give expression to their life experiences. The space in which I prefer to meet them is one both neutralised and enlivened by a legacy of radically divergent uses and for which I invite my students to find new ones. Adam describes the Christian bible as a textual canon which operates 'not as a repository of final answers but as a reference point that gives even the most marginal position an entry point into the conversation and provisional legitimacy'. I agree, offering the slight modification that both the biblical and all literary canons are more than reference points; they are capacious spaces of play if only inhabited by a diverse spectrum of readers.

My argument for a canon is not that the texts within it are intrinsically great (although, as Adam points out, many are) but that canons, in their durability, express something of what human beings have found *useful* in literature across time and space. Canons evolve through application not through collusion. Ultimately I don't think it is for the academy to form or reinforce a canon but, rather, to encourage readers from the widest possible range of backgrounds to read canonical works with close attention to the

history of their uses. Canons are living organisms, permeable to their readerships. The discipline of English, by inducting a diverse array of skilled readers onto the canon stage, promotes its usefulness for articulating and exploring the most pressing ethical conundrums of human existence for generations to come.

[sta_anchor id="bio"]Kate Flaherty is Lecturer in English and Drama, School of Literature Languages and Linguistics, ANU. Her research focuses on how Shakespeare's works play on the stage of public culture. Her monograph Ours as We Play it: Australia Plays Shakespeare (UWAP, 2011) examined three plays in performance in contemporary Australia. More recent work investigates Shakespeare on the colonial stage and the public interplay of the dramas with education, imperial politics and sectarian friction. Her work has been published in Contemporary Theatre Review, Australian Studies and Shakespeare Survey. She has also contributed to collections published by CUP, Rodopi, and Palgrave and (forthcoming) Arden Shakespeare. Kate is a member of the executive of the Australia and New Zealand Shakespeare Association (ANZSA), a member of the International Shakespeare Conference, and a Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy.

A Canon for Whom? A Canon for What?: A Response to Adam Kotsko

By **Luoshu Zhang**

London Metropolitan University, UK

The question of whether a canon continues to be relevant is one I think about a lot, as it relates closely to my experience of studying English literature as an international student in Australia. In his article, in the context of elucidating his institution's commitment to teaching the 'Great Books tradition', Adam Kotsko first problematizes the Western canon, pointing out its limitations in representing other cultural traditions and human experiences in the modern, post-colonial world, particularly the experiences of women and racial minorities. He then defends the Western canon by arguing for its merits from three perspectives: pedagogical, academic and social. While I agree with most of his arguments on the merits of the Western canon, I think they miss the real point of contention, which is not what the canon is good for but whether it should be the only learning material for a humanities education program.

I'm not against the idea of a canon. Studying in the Western humanities tradition as an international student allows me to access and compare the canons of two great cultures, one of the West and one of my nation, China. China has its own canon too, and a very exclusive one at that. My life as a reader started with reading classics that are taught within the Chinese tradition. Since age six, my parents gave me the task of getting familiar with a series of ancient Chinese philosophical and literary texts, such as the *Analects of Confucius* (《论语》), the *Great Learning* (《大学》) and *A Selection of Chinese Classical Essays* (《古文观止》). Funnily enough, 'A Selection of Chinese Classical Essays' is a modest translation of the book's title. A more literal translation would be 'no need to read other ancient essays after you've read these'. How canonical is that?!**[1]**

As I grew up, I become increasingly skeptical of my parents', and so many others', belief that these books defined what it means to be Chinese and are thus, essentially, must-reads for every Chinese person. Nevertheless, I'm grateful that I've been given the chance to read them at a young age. I would definitely recommend these books to anyone who is interested in studying Chinese culture and history in depth.

Kotsko notes the somewhat paradoxical role that capitalism has played in disseminating the classics to the masses, given the aristocratic and religious attitudes most of these books present. What he doesn't mention is that

capitalism has disseminated the classics not only to the working class but also to people of other cultures. It was through the Penguin Classics that I was introduced to Western literature and philosophy. Such a 'canon' gave me a place to start. From *Oedipus* to *Frankenstein*, Shakespeare to Woolf, these books map out a trajectory of Western cultural and intellectual development. Like Kotsko, I loved the idea that there was 'a list of books that could grant me credibility and respectability'. As an international student from a vastly different cultural background with a desire to study in the Western humanities tradition, such a list of books provided me a sense of sureness, of knowing that I was on the 'right' track.

The Western Canon has its merits. But I think this is not the point of contention. According to Kotsko, the Great Books tradition starts from the premise that 'every college student should engage with primary texts of enduring importance' as higher education becomes increasingly specialised. The inevitable question is thus: by what standards can we define a text as 'a primary text of enduring importance'? That it inspired the development of Western culture? Or that it reveals or represents something about humanity, non-restricted to the West?

From my experience, in discussing what qualities make a book great, academics (Western or not) tend to stress literary value and the capacity of a book to have cultural influence, to reflect on the reality of a historical era. Yet, for me, what makes a book truly great is always the power to transcend time, space, and cultural barriers. *Hamlet* continues to be important to me not because it ranks high in the Western Canon, but because it connects to me, because it fills me with passion and dread and sorrow, because when Hamlet ponders the meaning of existence in Shakespeare's language, my heart resonates. Western classics are great precisely because of this power they have. However, they are not the only books that have such a power.

While I haven't encountered many traditional classics in my study of literature, I have read many texts that have been regarded as modern classics, including works by Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, William Faulkner and Aldous Huxley. Many of these books have become very important to me. Some have inspired me to see reality from a different perspective, some have altered my perception of what literature can be.

My interest in themes of alienation, race and post-colonial experience has led me to read many works by less well-known writers who do not fit so easily into the category 'Western'. These books have revealed to me other worlds, other dimensions of human experience, and affected me no less than the Western classics. Reading them always reminds me why I love literature in the first place—to be able to peer into the minds of others, to see beyond the present horizon.

What is the true purpose of gaining a higher education in core humanities disciplines that, from my experience, have taught both canonical and non-canonical, 'great' Western works as well as works of those who live on the margins of Western experience? What do college students really need? A reading list that helps them to better understand the developmental trajectory of the Western world, or one that enables them to see the diversity of cultures and societies as well as the overlapping territories and the internal connectedness that ultimately define us as human beings? What does humanity of the twenty-first century need?

In studying English literature, what have struck me most with awe have been the occasions when I read an English expression and immediately recognise that there's an almost exactly correlative expression in Chinese. I know that this is not the result of the expression's having been translated from Chinese into English but, rather, 'mere' coincidence. 'Constant dropping wears away a stone', for instance, has an exact same expression in Chinese idiom that means persistence will achieve an unlikely object. To 'skate on thin ice' is very similar to a Chinese idiom that describes risky situations. And, in Chinese, 'test the waters' means trying something first before deciding whether to get involved in it as well.

Humans that have lived in different spheres of the earth in different eras of history somehow used very similar metaphors to describe a certain thing or a certain feeling, and they did so without knowing of the metaphor's existence in other cultures. And this happens not only linguistically, but also in historical, religious and literary discourses and contexts. Washington Irving's short story 'Rip Van Winkle', for example, derives from a European folktale very similar to a third-century-AD Chinese tale. Are not such coincidences the most fascinating and beautiful thing about humanity? Should not such shared experiences be what we seek to explore and understand in this postcolonial world?

Considering debates about the Western canon, it is probably time to imagine an alternative canon which, while acknowledging the importance of white, straight masters, acknowledges that this does not encompass all experience. Recently, I was inspired by an event organised by the ANU Humanities Research Centre, as part of a series called 'Books that Changed Humanity', which focused on the Hindu epic *Ramayana*. When it comes to thinking about a more globally inclusive canon, I believe such events can be a good place to begin. The Western Canon should continue to be an inspiring source for those who want to understand the roots and continuities of Western culture and civilisation, but it should not be the only canon available to us.

[*sta_anchor id="bio"*]Luoshu Zhang: *I was born in the Southwest of China, moved to Shanghai when I was seven and have lived there ever since. Now I am a third-year literature student at the Australian National University, with a keen interest in themes of alienation, race and post-colonial experiences. I love theatre and music, write fiction and poetry in Chinese in leisure time and only just started exploring the possibility of writing in English. When I feel stuck in my creative work, I work on translating English poetry and short stories into Chinese, and vice versa.*

Notes

[1] Cucai Wu and Diaohou Wu, eds., *A Selection of Chinese Classical Essays from Guwen Guanzhi*, translated by Luo Jingguo (Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, 2005). Cucai Wu and Diaohou Wu, eds., *Guwen Guanzhi: An Anthology of Chinese Classical Prose*, translated by Wong Siu-kit (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2006).

Canons: Damned If You Do and Damned If You Don't—A Response to Adam Kotsko

By **Alice Te Punga Somerville**

London Metropolitan University, UK

As a Maori scholar of Maori, Pacific and Indigenous Literary and Cultural Studies, I spend a lot of time outside of canons. There are other centres for me, both inside and outside the academy, and I happily occupy those. But for my entire academic career, whether housed in English, Maori Studies, or Indigenous Studies, I am the person (my work is the work, my students are the students) people think of when they sing 'one of these things is not like the others'. You could say my scholarly work is non-canonical. No-one designs an English curriculum and writes in 'Indigenous Literatures' first. No-one designs an Indigenous Studies curriculum by starting with literatures in English.

But is non-canonical the same as anti-canonical?

My first academic position was in a small English department in New Zealand that required all majors to complete two pre-twentieth-century classes. In theory this ensured that all majors—even those whose interests were firmly contemporary—had an understanding of the complex historical and formal elements of the English language literary tradition. Likewise, my own undergraduate major required one 'Shakespeare' class, a minimum number of other 'historical' classes, plus (a vestige of long-ago departmental arrangements) a class in linguistics. In other English departments these requirements are structured differently, but the idea is still the same. When I arrived at that first job, I railed against the requirement because of what I felt it communicated to students (and academics): pre-twentieth century literature (mostly by straight white middleclass men) is important, and all the rest is optional. No budding Medievalist would be required to take classes outside their areas of interest (including, my more specific concern, classes about literatures of the land, country or region in which they actually lived), while students had to wrangle timetables brimming with early-modern poetry and Victorian novels to fit in Pacific, Indigenous, contemporary, New Zealand, theory-focused and postcolonial classes. (That 'my' classrooms tended to be far more diverse than others did not feel irrelevant. And the higher enrolments in what amounted to compulsory classes were unfairly compared against

others as if they were more popular for another reason.) Canons: you're damned if you do.

After a while in the classroom, however, my thinking shifted. When teaching Indigenous or Pacific literatures, you hope that students will have a broad sense of the literary tradition out of which, and back to which, authors write. But my students were surprised that Shakespeare had been writing about race and colonialism, and hadn't heard about the voyages of Indigenous people to eighteenth and nineteenth century London which left imprints on literary production there. Who was Omai? How did *The Tempest* relate to the Pacific? Why did Sia Figiel end her poem with the immortal words 'What the fuck is a daffodil??' I had to start my classes with lectures about European representations of XYZ rather than being able to get straight into XYZ texts on their own terms. It turned out that two randomly-selected pre-twentieth-century courses don't by themselves provide an overview of the whole tradition. My students knew things about various periods, genres or authors but had little sense of connections between them: whether the Bennett sisters appeared before or after Beowulf wasn't something they had the opportunity to consider; they might know Marlowe and Melville but not Milton. If only my students knew 'the canon' (any canon!) so when they came to my class we could start our conversations with a shared understanding of the literary tradition the XYZ writers engage, challenge and extend. And so, you see, canons: you're damned if you don't.

The Western Canon is not the only group of texts that acts—or is made to act—canonically. David Damrosch, writing about trends in postcolonial literary studies which seem at odds with the roots of that field in a critique of the power wielded by canonical formations, proposes three kinds of canon: the hypercanon (celebrities), counter-canon (other writers widely known who are understood to pose alternatives to the hypercanon) and the shadow canon (texts people feel they should be able to say they have read, even though no one actually teaches or publishes on them).^[1] If you search Maori authors in the MLA database, you will find 112 articles about Witi Ihimaera, 92 about Patricia Grace, and 88 about Keri Hulme. Next are Hone Tuwhare and Robert Sullivan at 23. No one else gets more articles than you could count on one hand. In 2015, English departments in New Zealand collectively taught six books of fiction or poetry by four Maori writers. There are six book-length treatments of Maori literatures in English, of which four focus on Ihimaera and Grace. (Damned if you do.) And yet, who would teach and New Zealand literature class that overlooks Ihimaera and Grace? Who would teach Pacific literature without Wendt? (Damned if you don't.) These observations and questions compelled my current book project 'Ghost Writers: the Maori books you've never read.'

Conversations about canons are always about space: how many classes does a student take? How many texts can a class cover? What breadth

would adversely affect depth and vice versa? When space is scarce, competition arises which both produces polarisation and works against non-combative (indeed potentially generative) relationships between various entities. And space, in any settler nation, is also about place. The expansion and extension of canons is laudable, urgent work. Kotsko notes the absence of women for much of the St John's College curriculum and the decision of his own institution to include 'contemporary and diverse texts'. And yet, in settler colonies, with historical and ongoing practices of assimilation, we should be cynical, or at least careful, about challenges to the canon that are merely inclusive and, ultimately, still canon-focused. Assimilationist tinkering with the canon is challenged in *Red on Red: Native American Literary Separatism*, in which literary scholar and writer Craig Womack tips the relationship between American and Native literature upside down: instead of Native lit being a branch or offshoot of the American tree, Womack suggests, it could be the trunk. In Canada, there is an active conversation in higher education about making an Indigenous Studies class compulsory for all students; at my previous job in English at University of Hawai'i-Manoa, we decided to insist through an additional breadth requirement that all majors engage with Indigenous Hawaiian / Pacific texts. On one level these all gesture towards another canon: they tell students (and academics) 'the Western intellectual tradition is not the only one in this place'.

We need canons because without them people like me don't have a structure to push against. Or perhaps more accurately, the structure against which we must push is tangibly present in few forms and, of course, that is precisely how it retains its power. Canons produce a semblance of structure which maps onto the arrangements of power pretty closely. If the centre doesn't have to name itself, perhaps naming (teaching, speaking about, reading) a canon is a way to admit certain texts are not quite the ubiquitous (or apolitical) centre after all? There's a difference between having a shared understanding of the powerful in order to teach (and mobilise) an analysis of power and a situation of 'canon confidential' in which the usual suspects are mysteriously at the centre.

Kotsko characterises post-canon-wars American higher education as 'directionless' or 'content free'. And yet, for the first time in history, students attending university in the US who don't look like the people who wrote most of the texts in the Western canon can engage with the histories, literatures, sciences, perspectives of the Indigenous Americas. And, of course, Black and Asian and Latin@ and all kinds of other Americas. In countries like the US and Australia (and, indeed, my home country of New Zealand) we should be attempting to move towards a professoriate—and curriculum—that both reflects and serves the wider community. As I write, syllabi related to #BlackLivesMatter circulate on Facebook because most universities do not currently provide American students with the ability to

contextualise, understand and respond to the urgent issues in their lives and communities. Most Australian university students have no idea who the traditional owners are of the lands on which they study (let alone the intellectual traditions and other significance of the place). The absence of canons (if that is indeed ever possible—perhaps better to say the absence of canons signalled as such) does not necessarily mean ‘content-free’ any more than the presence of canons signalled as such is a guarantee of ‘direction’.

Canons do not produce themselves: they are produced by people. This year, as my position at Macquarie University (Sydney, Australia) ends, I am facing an academic job market in which there are far more advertised positions for Medievalists than for people like me. Commitments to canonical texts in this lean season produce departments in which certain positions need to be filled immediately and others can only be imagined as aspirations for an endlessly-deferred fatter time. Perhaps this is the ultimate logic of canons: inside the academy as well as beyond it, certain texts (re)produce certain worlds. If we are damned either way, maybe it is worth considering an alternative. What courage would it take to imagine that those texts which are presently ‘canonical’ and ‘non-canonical’ could have a future relationship that is relational rather than simply competitive or incorporative? How exciting to imagine a future academy—and future classrooms—in which our analysis and experience of power does not pit me against a Chaucerian but has room for both of us and more besides.

[sta_anchor id="bio"]Alice Te Punga Somerville (Te Āti Awa, Taranaki) writes and teaches at the intersections of Indigenous, Pacific, literary and cultural studies. She has taught English at Victoria University of Wellington and University of Hawai‘i-Mānoa, and Indigenous Studies at Macquarie University. Her first book was Once Were Pacific: Maori Connections to Oceania (Minnesota UP, 2012) and she is working on two book projects: ‘Indigenous-Indigenous Encounters’ and ‘Ghost Writers: the Maori Books You’ve Never Read.’ She also writes the occasional poem.

Notes

[1] Damrosch, David. ‘World Literature in a Postcanonical, Hypercanonical Age.’ *Comparative Literature in an Age of Globalization*. Ed Haun Saussy. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006. 43-53.

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