Australian Women's Book Review

Volume 15.2 (2003)

"A Peace Offering" by Saren Dobkins

ISSN: 1033 9434

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Editorial

All societies can make their writers and artists feel that they are enforcing a parochial and conservative complacency, and at various historical points, all have. The 1950s was in particular marked by a `paranoid nationalism' that Ghassan Hage suggests is currently on the rise again. In Australasia, geographically cut off from surrounding countries, writers have periodically escaped to live elsewhere. In earlier times, it was almost the norm to run off to Europe or perhaps America where the action - it was thought - really was. More recently, other countries are equally often chosen as a vantage point from which to observe Australia from the outside.

In *Love Upon the Chopping Board* the Australian narrator Claire Maree does just that, commenting `cutting myself off from Australia two and a half years ago had literally saved my life' (49). Making out in a different country is facilitated by an openness to other cultures (encouraged in the 1980s in public policy and government rhetorics) but currently perhaps declining. Claire Maree's new Japanese friend, Marou is attracted to her because she makes a point of speaking Japanese, which she does well. Clare Maree has grown up in an alienating environment. Earlier, she reports, `I read novels to escape the society around me'; The `one big pleasure' in life was, after school, to get the train and frequent the `one and only bookstore'(31) on the main street of the nearby town. This led to denunciation in assembly for being found `roaming around the main street in men's blue jeans and a bright red jumper' it being `inexcusable for a girl to wear men's clothes' (32). But later when she returns, it seems different, less overpoweringly coercive - `after months here with Marou I'd actually begun to discover parts of this town I liked'(49).

Boundary and border crossings are characteristic of thinkers, who include most writers. Another example of a complicated traversal of national/cultural boundaries is found in Azar Nafisi's account of life in Iran, recounted in her recent *Reading Lolita in Tehran*. In 1995, Nafisi, having been suspended from her academic teaching position at Tehran University in 1981 for not wearing the veil, brought together some of her women students from classes she then held at Allameh Tabatabai in a reading group that discussed English literature. At first sight, this activity might seem predisposed to create an `uncritical, glowing picture of that other world, of the West'. Yet for Nafisi (and, she suggests, the students) the main function of the group is `to create a parallel fantasy...that runs against the fantasy that the Islamic Republic has made of their lives' (281). Nafisi discovered to her bemusement while still working at Allameh Tabatabai that Edward Said's commentary upon Jane Austen as not offering a critique of the slavery upon which the wealth of the southern English bourgeoisie of her times was built had made its way to Iran - and was raised as one of the criticisms of her choice of authors. At that stage, Nafisi had not even read Said but later realised that it was `ironic that a Muslim fundamentalist should quote Said against Austen ... that the most reactionary elements in Iran had come to identify with and co-opt the work and theories of those considered revolutionary in the West' (290). She was of course almost sure that her colleague who took issue with the study of Austen had not actually read *Mansfield Park*, or possibly Said either.

The cross cultural encounters generated by the reading group also lead to Nafisi considering differences between Western and non-Western actions that might be viewed as feminist. She writes: `It is said that the personal is political. That is not true of course. At the core of the fight for political rights is the desire to protect ourselves, to prevent the political from intruding on our individual lives. The realm of imagination is a bridge between them...' (273) This is a different kind of embattlement, but an

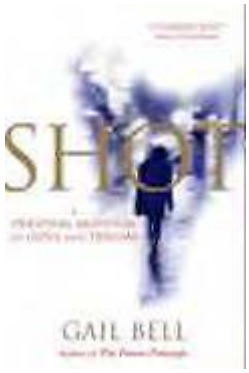
individualist quietism changes nothing.

Some years ago in Tasmania, you will recall, Amanda Lohrey encountered trouble that led to the pulping of *The Reading Group*. So we should not underestimate these effects even though there might seem to be 'something faintly ridiculous about a reading group'. They might seem, as the novel suggests, to be only for 'people who were fringe or impotent, or for middle-aged housewives who had nothing better to do with their time' (34). But perhaps the power of literature, and the power of oppositional and creative thinkers, is greater than we might periodically feel - times like the present being a case in point. Anyway here is the latest issue of the *Review* for you... (CF)

The Unseen Wounds of Gun Culture

Gail Bell, *Shot: A Personal Response to Guns and Trauma*, Picador, 2003.
A Review and an Interview by Suzanne Eggins

With memoir the creative non-fiction genre of the moment, the temptation for writers and wannabes is to think that any mug can do it. But the memoir's use of literary techniques to present subjective recollections is bound by the first rule of fictional narrative: there must be drama. Gail Bell has no trouble on that score: in 1968 Gail was shot in the back as she walked to her Toongabbie home in Sydney's western suburbs. She was 17 years old.



The shooting left Gail with a .22 calibre bullet embedded beneath her left rib. It stayed there for five years, until surgeons realised she was slowly being poisoned by the lead. It took two very unpleasant operations to get the bullet out, so Gail now suffers from nerve damage caused by both the original injury and by the surgery itself, although perhaps the greater damage is the psychological effects of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Now in her fifties, Gail re-lives her experience in *Shot*, her second book, published a few months ago by Picador. Subtitled *A Personal Response to Guns and Trauma*, *Shot* is a sophisticated, skilful example of how the memoir can avoid self-indulgence, and thus have relevance to a broad readership. Rather than just taking us through her shocking experience, Gail interweaves an account of her own physical and psychological trauma with a sensitive, in-depth exploration of the world of guns and the stress disorders they leave in their wake.

In her search to understand how that one, unprovoked, violent event has cast such a long shadow over her adult life, Gail interviews other shooting victims: Billy, a Vietnam vet shot by an AK-47 high velocity machine gun; Mal, also a Vietnam vet, shot six times including twice by 'friendly fire'; Wendy, a woman of extraordinary personal strength, who watched her husband bleed to death after he and she were both shot by a deranged ex-biker. Gail speaks to detectives who failed to identify her assailant, to a woman who shoots wounded animals for the RSPCA, to another who had a fake gun aimed at her head during a botched supermarket robbery. She pores over ballistics reports, studies gun theory, visits a gun fair, and even signs on for a day's training at a recreational shooters' club.

Harrowing reading at times, *Shot* is an extraordinarily powerful investigation of the mystery of gun culture and the deep and unpredictable wounds of PTSD, a disorder unrecognised at the time Gail was shot.

In an interview, I asked Gail to elaborate on the psychological condition she calls 'hyper-vigilance', which she suspects is a symptom of PTSD.
'I seem to live in this state of hyper-awareness,' Gail says. 'Even if I'm not focusing on anything in particular I seem to be intensely engaged at some level somewhere in my mind. It's very tiring. It engages the nervous system. I suspect that having now done quite a bit of research for *Shot* it's part of the greater spectrum of post-traumatic stress disorder.'

Gail feels her hyper-vigilance most in social situations. 'If I go out to restaurants or social events or anywhere really I'm always very conscious of who's doing what where, and where everyone is in relation to me. And I now realise that that scanning and vigilant behaviour relates to vestiges of the old trauma. Parts of the mind hold on to that and remain vigilant long after they need to.'

But while her intense hyper-awareness is tiring and a strain on the nerves, it's also an asset for a writer.
'I'm definitely more alert,' Gail agrees.
Forever, I ask?
'I'm beginning to think it's forever, yes,' Gail agrees. 'The more people I speak to who are living with PTSD, the more I think so. I think that all that changes are your coping mechanisms. It's like having asthma or something. Some days it's good and some days it's not good. And you go through cycles of coping and not coping.'

As Gail writes in *Shot*, how people cope with violent assault relates both to what they were like before and how people treat them afterwards:

> A body, once shot, is never the same again. It remembers what happened by storing its shock and outrage in unusual places: skin, muscle, connective tissue, nerves. Time passes, the body renews itself, but curiously, perversely, the visceral memory remains. Freud called this body memory "physical fixation". Pavlov described it as a cluster of defensive responses. How extreme this body neurosis or disturbance is seems to depend on the degree of insult to the body, and on the body's access to records of "prior trauma" in the form of old memories; but the stand-out pre-disposing factors to not getting over physical assault seem to be related to how well supported the whole person perceives itself to be afterwards, and how well integrated the personality was to begin with.

Gail has coped remarkably well with the unmotivated violence inflicted on her. Raised in a large and (*Shot* suggests) caring but no-nonsense family, Gail would later train as a pharmacist at Sydney University. Although choosing science for vocational reasons, Gail nurtured her earliest love of reading and writing by joining writers' groups, including one run by Sue Hampton. Gail began publishing short stories in the 1970s and 80s, and always planned to write a novel. But she'd also had the idea of writing a retrospective history of poisons, an idea triggered by a family drama: two of her father's brothers had apparently been poisoned to death by their father. Sue Hampton encouraged Gail to work on the poison idea but to 'foreground the personal stuff'.

The outcome was Gail's first book *The Poison Principle*, which won the NSW Premier's Literary Award for non-fiction in 2002. As in *Shot,* Gail began with the poisoning mysteries in her own family, but extended outwards from those personal events to include a fascinating exploration of poisons and poisonings across Western history, mythology and fiction.

While *The Poison Principle* was overtly literary, dense with metaphor, symbol and allusion, *Shot* is a more confident and (paradoxically) less self-conscious book. *Shot* uses literary techniques of figurative language, suspense, foreshadowing, and intertextuality, but these are grounded by the first-hand interviews Gail carried out, and of course by her own first-person account of her shooting and its aftermath. The result is a creative blend of personal memoir and investigative non-fiction, addressed to a broad readership in a literary but highly accessible style.

While the novel remains an option for the future, Gail plans to stay with non-fiction for her next project. But with two dramatic memoirs behind her, how much more 'stuff' does Gail have to draw on in her own life, I wonder?
Gail laughs. 'Every one has dramatic stuff in their life. Whatever I do next - and I have got a couple of ideas - I won't be going in to my own personal fear department again because I really couldn't put myself through that again.'

That comment confirmed what I'd suspected: given the traumatic events it draws on, *Shot* could not have been easy for Gail to write. I asked Gail if she had found it a form of self-therapy.
'When I first finished *Shot*, I regretted having started it,' Gail confesses. 'It just brought so much stuff up to the surface, and the mask or carapace I was living behind - that I was in control - had sort of fallen away. I felt very vulnerable. And wishing I'd never done it. But as time passes and I talk about it more, and I do public things and interviews or, as is now happening get lots and lots of emails from readers, I think I've probably done a good thing. I'm coming around to thinking that. And I'm coming around to thinking that in six months time I'll have settled down again. But I wasn't thinking that a few months ago. I was thinking: it's better to live in denial.'

The messages Gail has received from readers suggest that *Shot* has captured what post-traumatic stress of many types means in actuality.
'Trauma is trauma,' Gail points out. 'It doesn't have to be physical. And I'm getting letters from people who've been through stuff completely unrelated to shooting who have picked up on various parts, particularly the aftermath of something and dealing with either their own or their spouse's long-term stress disorder.'

The response Gail has received from readers also validates the question Gail asks of us in *Shot*:

> If the greatest obstacle to getting over trauma is the inability to transform the initial assault into what it truly is - a story from the past - then may it not have been better for me, for all of us, to have spoken?

Shot is not relaxing bed-time reading. But it is a provocative and powerful confrontation of unmotivated violence that, as Gail's experience and contemporary life both show us, can happen to anyone, anytime.

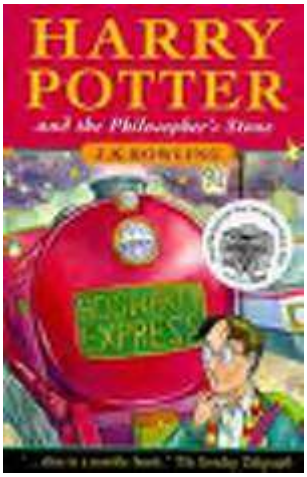
Suzanne Eggins is a senior lecturer in the School of English at the University of New South Wales

The Fight to Interpret Harry Potter

J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, Bloomsbury, 2003; *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, Bloomsbury, 2000; *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, Bloomsbury, 1999; *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, Bloomsbury, 1998*; Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, Bloomsbury, 1997.

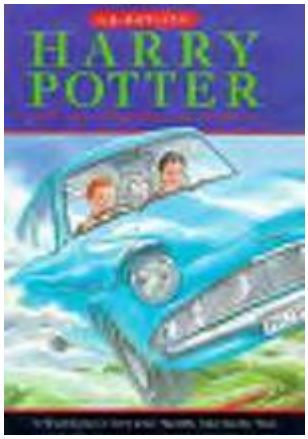
Review article by Evelyn Hartogh

I can't deny I love Harry Potter and have read and re-read the books over and over again. The pleasure in the text, for me, at least, is how Harry never gives up. Oh - he sulks every now and again, and in the latest novel he throws a few tantrums, but Rowling is able so vividly to describe Harry's state of mind that his behaviour seems completely appropriate to his circumstances.



While many critics have compared Harry Potter to other Fantasy novels that deal with magic, I see greater similarities to science fiction epics with the lone protagonist in an alienating world rife with conspiracy. Fantasy and Science Fiction are sometimes grouped collectively under the genre of Speculative Fiction. I prefer this way of considering the genre of works set in environments which are considered 'imaginative' rather than 'realistic', largely because I see little difference in the construction of magic and science in these works. Again, Magical creatures and Aliens are also constructed in similar ways. Magic and advanced science operate in Speculative Fiction to give the protagonist abilities they do not have in our reality and, therefore, experiences unavailable to us except on a philosophic level. Magical creatures and Aliens operate to give characters the ability to interact with the 'other', by creating difference with other worlds or other dimensions. The Alien or Magical 'other' allows exploration (in Speculative fiction) of discriminatory behaviour towards those perceived to be 'different' from the protagonists.

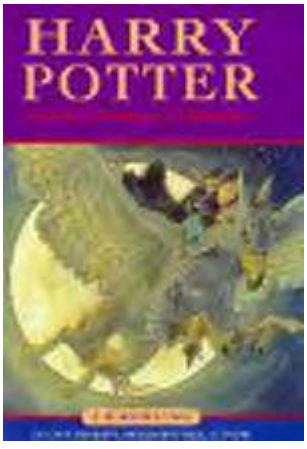
My pleasure in Harry is also in my perception of him as the ultimate 'other'. Harry is consistently marked by his difference. The first book opens with an insight into Harry's life with his Uncle, Aunt and Cousin, the 'very normal' Dursleys. We learn that Harry was abandoned on their doorstep as a baby and is routinely verbally and emotionally abused, and physically neglected by them; literally forced to live in a cupboard under the stairs like Cinderella. The cruelty of the Dursleys is contrasted to Harry's entry into the hidden world (within our 'normal' world) of the Magical community where he is heralded as a hero because he survived an attempted murder (and destroyed) a bloodthirsty Fascist Dictator, Lord Voldemort, 'He Who Must Not be Named'. Once it is revealed that Harry is really a Wizard, his sense of isolation and difference is momentarily shifted into a sense of belonging to similar people. Each book deals with a single school year at Hogwarts; thus they are framed by Harry leaving and returning to the Dursleys for the summer. With Harry's true identity out of the closet, the Dursley's begin to focus their abuse around what they call 'his abnormality', and continually make derogatory remarks about 'his kind'.



All does not go that well though for Harry - even with the Magical community where he has been famous all his life without knowing it. The price of fame is scrutiny, and Harry is routinely placed at the centre of scandals, his sanity, motivations, and behaviour, routinely held up to public consumption and debate within the Magical community. In the first two books, Harry is vindicated at the conclusion and his heroism acknowledged by Hogwarts and the Magical community; in the subsequent instalments, however, he operates in greater and greater secrecy, battling not only Voldemort but also the government and the mass media. The use of propaganda becomes a frequent theme of the later novels, and Rowling develops not only the character of Harry but also the evolution of the media perception of Harry within the Magical community. The structure of the novels, although centred on Harry's perceptions, operates akin to a Soap Opera where the characters have less knowledge than the audience. The reader gets the whole story of Harry's adventures, while the 'public' of the novel is fed propaganda and Harry's 'truth' is suppressed.

Consumption

Michael Bronski estimates that upwards of 300 million Harry Potter books are in circulation. The fifth and latest instalment *Order of the Phoenix* was the most pre-ordered book in history and in the best sellers lists for five months before it was released. Book sales aside, the *Guardian* estimates that the wider Harry Potter franchise is worth £3 billion a year. The effect of the Harry Potter franchise cannot be ignored in any discussion of the text, as it is the environment in which any reading of the text exists. Jyotsha Kapur sees the scale of the franchise as demonstrating that Potter has moved from a literary character to a brand, and details the extreme measures of narrative control that Warner Bros AOL attempt to have over fan websites bearing the Harry Potter name. Legal attacks on children's unauthorised use of fictional characters are well documented in Naomi Klein's 2001 book, *No Logo*, in which she cites Mattel's lawsuit-backed control of the play narratives of Barbie (which are currently becoming less successful) and many other petty corporate objections to school children drawing popular trademarked characters in murals. The modern cultural environment, as both Klein and Kapur point out, privileges obedient consumption over interaction or diversity of interpretation.



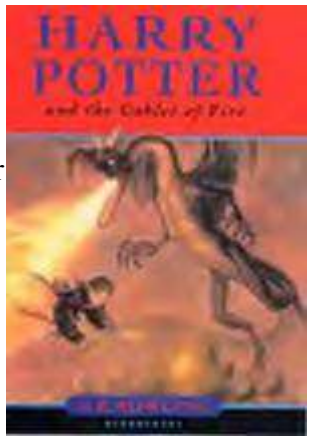
The angry furore of the many denouncements of Bronski's queer reading of the novels (to which I will return later) is another example of an obedient public doing the work of the corporation by restricting the interpretations of the text back to a branded copyrighted meaning which does not allow for multiplicity of views. Alternative interpretations of Potter are challenged, not by the usual assumptions of authorial intent, but by corporate financial interests. The financial worth of Harry Potter is threatened by suggestions of homosexuality within a homophobic culture, and this interpretation is quickly dismissed as 'read in sub-text' rather than valid, well-substantiated argument. Any text, once in the public domain, is vulnerable to diverse interpretation, and certainly the array of critical debate which has surrounded not only the books, but also the merchandising and fan culture, suggests that Harry Potter is acting as a collective springboard for cultural debate.

Kapur also sees immense simplification in the movie adaptations, suggesting they rob the narrative of the critiques of conservatism in Rowling's original texts, and that this is more evidence that Potter has been streamlined into nothing more than a logo used to sell baseball caps and jelly beans. Yet reduction of themes is common when highly popular Fantasy and Science Fiction books become films, and often the film acts as little more than a visual trigger to encourage fans to reminisce over the (usually

extremely long) text. For example, in the 1980s, Dino de Laurentis's cinematic production of the best selling Science Fiction novel *Dune* was virtually incomprehensible to anyone who had not read the books.

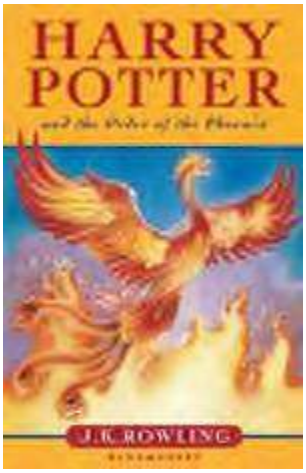
Literary Worth

While Kapur, in juxtaposing the Potter books to the films, suggests a greater complexity in the book's social satire, and thus elevates the book to an authoritative and valuable text, A.S. Byatt, on the other hand, unfavourably compares Rowling to other popular writers of the Fantasy genre like Ursula Le Guin and Terry Prachet. Rowling, Byatt suggests, lacks Le Guin's, 'anthropologically coherent world where magic really does act as a force', as well as Pratchett's, 'multifarious genius for strong parody'.



Byatt also dismissively characterises Harry Potter's audience as, 'people whose imaginative lives are confined to TV cartoons, and the exaggerated (more exciting, not threatening) mirror-worlds of soaps, reality TV and celebrity gossip', casting doubt on the literary merit of the Potter books if they are consumed under the influence of such melodramatic spectacle. Although Potter now commands an adult as well as child audience, Byatt sees the text as regressive, 'a latent-period fantasy, belonging to the drowsy years between 7 and adolescence'. By characterising the text as regressive, Byatt can divorce it from any sexual metaphor - yet her comment on Harry's behaviour on his first date with a girl as, 'unbelievably limp', inadvertently supports Bronski's queering of Potter. While Byatt cites Freud in order to dismiss Potter as a cliched child's wish of the 'family romance', Bronski, and Kapur, bring to the text a greater multiplicity of interpretations. Fictional texts that 'do well' in cultural studies, *Buffy* and *Star Trek* for example, have slowly shifted in their placement as popular artifacts to texts of cultural significance. They have managed to transcend their medium, TV - considered the lowest of all cultural art forms. Potter has the advantage of at least beginning as a book, but the crass commercialisation that surrounds the texts, and the attacks on fans' use of the Harry Potter name and narrative, suggest that the book has become redundant as an artifact; its literary worth is questioned, as it becomes primarily an image used to sell products.

The phenomenon of Potter is described by Byatt as, 'the substitution of celebrity for heroism', where, 'nobody is trying to save or destroy anything beyond Harry Potter and his friends and family'; the books lack the 'shiver of awe' that Keats produces. While Harry does spend a lot of time avoiding being murdered by Voldemort, his concerns are usually with thwarting Voldemort's plans to regain power, so that the magical world does not revert to the mistrust and murder of the Fascist Dark Lord's previous reign of terror. Potter is also usually victimised by everyone around him and is periodically feared by his fellow students to be a murderer, insane, or both.



The current fame of Harry Potter mirrors the character's identity in the novel, where Harry was famous in the Magical community since he was a baby because he was 'the boy who lived'. Although Harry remains unaware of this until he is 11 and admitted to Hogwarts school of wizardry, his character is already a celebrity in the text before he became famous in our world. In the third, fourth, and fifth, books Rowling also mirrors the

reception and debates over the Harry Potter books by intercutting the narrative with excerpts from the Wizard newspapers. In Potter's world he is the subject of debate over meaning, and his fame for surviving is almost a Warhol Superstar's empty talentless famous-for-being-famous celebrity, since he consciously did nothing to originally become hailed as a hero. Yet since then has shown remarkable bravery, unable to avoid his fate as The Dark Lord's nemesis, in a fashion similar to a Greek tragedy bearing a burden akin to the inherited duty of Orestes.

Race

Kapur notes a reduction of racial diversity in the transference from book to film, such as the Goblins who run the banks being portrayed as, 'barely disguised Jewish stereotypes' and the noble savage angle adopted with the, 'wise and ancient centaur, half man, half horse ... cast distinctly as a black man'. While, in the novel, Hogwarts boasts a multicultural range of students, Kapur suggests this is reduced in the film to the token inclusion of only one 'student of colour'. Phil Kloer suggests that the books' position on issues of racial 'purity' is yet to be fully developed. Racism in the Magical community is not based on the differences in colour between humans but is instead portrayed through divisions between Muggles, Magical Creatures, and Witches and Wizards, and further divided between pure-blood Witches and Wizards and Mud-bloods (those tainted with Muggle ancestry). A 'mud-blood' can either be someone born to Muggle parents, or a person of 'mixed-race' with one Muggle and one Wizard parent.

Issues of race in the novels are intertwined with class structures, as those who promote purity of Wizard blood also discriminate against the poor whether they are 'full-blood' Witches and Wizards or not. The notion of the 'old Wizard family' is less based on racial discrimination than on class position. Class here is about 'breeding', and the cultural environment in which a Witch or Wizard grows up. Like the upper classes of our world, their elevation to a 'purity' of blood lines was achieved by inherited wealth which increases social and cultural power, and assumes a higher status based not on character but on financial standing.

Kloer also points out the similarity between the happy worker House Elves and justifications for slavery in American history. The House Elves' way of speaking recalls early American cinema's depiction of Afro-Americans as having below-average intelligence and a naturalised desire to serve the 'superior' white man. They also quite clearly bring to mind title of 'House Boy' used for African servants during Apartheid in South Africa. In Rowling's books, Hermione Grainger, Albus Dumbledore and Arthur Weasley agree that House Elves are enslaved and oppressed, but it is only Hermione who dares to upset the status quo and campaign for them to form a union to gain wages, health care and the like.

Class

By focusing the movie adaptions on the Hogwarts school, Kapur sees the films as, 'selling Englishness as a commodity', and turning the text into, 'a set of stories about a British boarding school'. Hogwarts is very much like the romanticised upper-class English 'public school' and Harry is unaware until the fourth novel that the maintenance of the castle is undertaken by the enslaved and unpaid House Elves. Until that point, Harry simply assumed everything was done by magic and no exploitation of labour was involved. The almost invisible presence of the House Elves at Hogwarts raises the issue of class blindness. By class blindness I mean the way in which people tend to interact within social groups that have the same level of financial privilege. For many of those in the upper and middle classes, poverty, and the services provided to them by those without wealth, is simply unseen, and incomprehensible.

Since capitalism denotes social worth via financial worth, the power and privilege of wealth offers a myth of 'deservedness' - although class status is never earned, only inherited based upon family background and opportunities for education. Class blindness acts to ensure the upper classes can ignore the inequitable structure which allows them to be in a position of privilege. Harry and his 'Wizard born' school mates enjoy a life of luxury; the services provided by the 'Worker born' House Elves are justified by both the Witches and Wizards, and even the Elves themselves, as a measure of protection and care of the Elves, rather than exploitation of their labour.

Race and class, within the Magical community, are constructed in a similar way to our own social structures. Although some of Rowling's protagonists are highly critical of class bias, the inclusion of these prejudices in the social structure of the Magical community has been widely attacked by critics, despite the diversity of Speculative Fiction having always had room for utopias, distopias and social satire. In many ways, Rowling's text is admirable in the blatancy with which it portrays the various prejudices of its characters. Race and class distinctions within the texts are only used by villains; although Harry is unenthusiastic about joining Hermione's campaign to liberate the House Elves, he nonetheless treats Dobby the House Elf with more respect than usually given to Elves by Witches and Wizards.

Sexuality

Kapur suggests that, due to simplifications inherent in branding an image, 'Harry Potter as a gay icon, for example, would be problematic since it would introduce conflicts'. While Byatt does not question Harry's sexuality she describes his first date as childish, 'filled with an 8-year-old's conversational manoeuvres', and observes that Harry has not developed the appropriate level of heterosexual identification common to 15-year-old boys. Bronski, meanwhile, in his queering of the Potter books, although stating that, 'it would be a lousy literary criticism simply to claim that the Potter books are 'gay'; they can obviously be read in a myriad of ways', has found that his article has inspired dozens of counter-claims protesting the heterosexuality of Harry Potter.

Bronski's argument is based on several queer aspects of the novel, namely: Harry's emergence from a cupboard (closet), to discover his 'abnormality' is shared by other people like him, with clear parallels to a 'coming out' story; the secretive operation of the Magical community who manage to hide themselves from a world prejudiced against magic by creating safe spaces invisible to Muggles; and the continued 'queer bashing' of the Dursleys whose normality is mocked as ignorant and bigoted.

In addition to these factors, there is also the phallic symbolism of the wands, the homoerotic connection between Harry and his nemesis Voldemort, and Harry's close relationship with his 'best friend' Ron Weasley. In the fourth book Harry must rescue 'the thing he would most sorely miss': while his competitors are rescuing their girlfriends or little sisters, Harry rescues Ron. Byatt was quite right in describing Harry's first date with a girl as 'unbelievably limp', since Harry's interest in Cho, and lack of enjoyment of his first kiss, causes him anxiety rather than heterosexual desire. Yet in the second book, Harry is thrilled to see Ron appear at his bedroom window in the middle of the night.

The division between the Muggle and Magical communities does bear many similarities to the schism between the queer and straight communities whereby heterosexual assumption dominates the majority of the media and venues, while queer perspectives, spaces, and media are marginalised. Looking at the Rowling books in this way suggests that the vilification of Mudbloods bears resemblance to the

discrimination faced by bisexuals in both the queer and straight communities. Mudbloods live in both worlds but belong wholly to neither, their mixed loyalties suggestive of the 'sitting on the fence' insult often applied to bisexuals.

Gender
Talking-book versions of Rowling's novels have a male narrator, and it is old news that the author's use of her initials was due to the publisher's suggestion that a female author would not sell as well. While the author is female, the male protagonist Harry Potter dominates the perception of the text, and therefore offers a male voice as dominant in the narrative. Strong and diverse female characters fill the books nonetheless, and sexism is virtually absent from the Magical community. Gender roles offer no resistance to women occupying positions of power, and discussions of the history of the magical community demonstrate a tradition of Witches being as powerful as Wizards in the social structure.

Yet, I cannot help wondering if the reception of the text would be different if the main protagonist were female? A male protagonist suggests a universality of appeal, whereas a female protagonist would probably denote the book as 'Chick-Lit' and be therefore less appealing to boys. Harry's friend Hermione offers a female voice to the texts, and, rather than being constructed as a stereotypical love interest or girl-needing-to-be-rescued, Hermione is the voice of reason to Ron and Harry's often absurd hysterics. Harry's reliance on Hermione only grows with each novel for she is far more intelligent and responsible than the boys. While at first this was a cause of irritation to Harry and Ron, Hermione is eventually accepted as a valuable asset to the boys' social circle. Hermione offers a positive depiction of the stereotypical girl-swat, and explores the ostracism that women encounter when they display their intelligence, yet she is still the foil to Harry's centrality in the text. Harry Potter's relationship to his sidekicks Ron and Hermione is similar to Barbie's relationship to the male and female doll friends you can buy for her to play with; Ron and Hermione are ultimately accessories to the central figure of Harry.

Ability
While the inclusion of magic offers characters extra abilities it also sets a new standard of 'normal' ability. The normalisation of magic allows for differentiation between Witches and Wizards and those without magical ability, such as Muggles and Squibs. Muggles are not only people without magical ability but are generally assumed to be unaware these abilities exist, so generally they do not regard themselves as lacking anything. Squibs, on the other hand, are people born into the Magical community but without the ability to perform magic. Thus, in the Magical community Squibs are considered disabled. Squibs are very aware of their lack of magical ability and often refer to themselves as 'useless' since the quality that holds together the Magical community is the ability to perform magic.

The Fight to Interpret Harry Potter
The Harry Potter books have certainly provoked strong reactions. Due to the pagan-like magical content, the American Christian Right has conducted many attempts, some successful, to ban it from local libraries. Its literary merit has come under question, mainly due to the immense financial success of film and product off-shoots from the book, yet this hasn't stopped academic studies such as Lana A. Whited's edited *The Ivory Tower and Harry Potter: Perspectives on a Literary Phenomenon*, in 2002 and The Nimbus 2003 conference on the Harry Potter phenomenon.

The conspicuous consumption of Harry Potter merchandising suggests an implied reading for the text - along the party lines of not the author, but the corporation that now owns the Harry Potter trademark,

Warner Brothers AOL. Control of the meaning of the text was best demonstrated by numerous columnists' negative responses to Bronski's queering of the Harry Potter text. While Bronski is concerned more with queer 'in a broad sense' as a disruptive element that undermines conservatism, his discussion of the queer allegories in the text led to multiple headlines denying that Harry is gay, and denouncing Bronski as inventing a gay subtext.

Race, class, sexuality and gender issues in the Potter narratives have also come under attack, mainly because the Magical community that Rowling offers begins as a utopia but, as the series progresses, develops into a dark and gross caricature of our own world's institutionalised prejudice, media bias, and government corruption. Rowling's imaginative world is as plagued as our own real world by a deceptive information network, a racist and rigid inherited class structure, and difference based on fixed identity which people like the Muggle Witch Hermione Grainger must endure and transcend.

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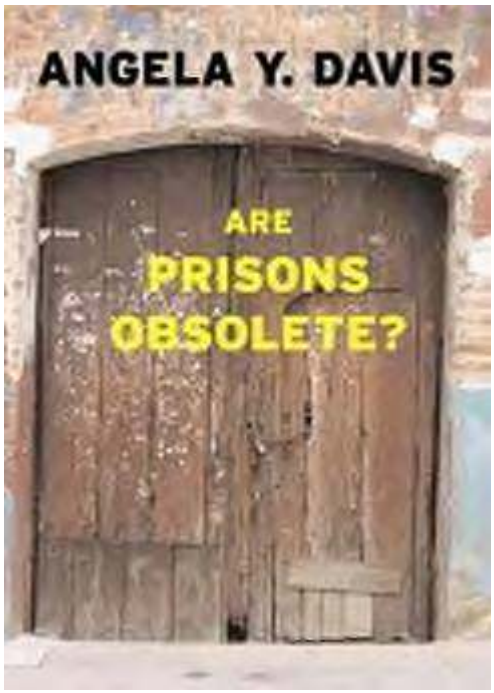
Are Prisons Obsolete or Are We Content To Remain Oblivious?

Angela Y Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?*, Seven Stories Press, 2003.
Reviewed By Gillian Brannigan

Are Prisons Obsolete' is the title of the latest book by Angela Davis. Engaged activist and academic since the 1960s, now employed in Women's Studies at UC Santa Cruz. Centrally involved in the struggle for prisoner's rights, Davis delivers compelling arguments that point toward nothing less than a revolution in our thinking about prisons as the only way to ensure safer and less violent communities. In a world seemingly obsessed with issues of law and order, she posits a radical vision that goes beyond concepts of prison reform.



In the space of just over one hundred pages *Are Prisons Obsolete?* interrogates many of our long held beliefs about crime and punishment. It considers the development in the nineteenth century of prisons as the primary system of punishment in the Western world. Prisons were seen through the ideology of enlightenment and Christian charity as the humane alternative to simplistic and archaic methods of retribution such as execution and torture. It was argued that prisons would promote the rehabilitation of inmates through quiet reflection and repentance enabling them eventually to rejoin society as law-abiding citizens. Even at the time of these reforms it was apparent that, while prison life was preferable to capital punishment, it did little to encourage rehabilitation.

Incarceration, especially solitary confinement, entails its own forms of dehumanisation and torture that have sparked many campaigns for prison reform. Davis shows the ultimate futility of the prison reform agenda as the only response to an increasing reliance on prisons as the solution to a failure to develop socially responsible and humane societies. There is ample proof that the greatest determinants of receiving a custodial sentence in the US are poverty, homelessness and racial difference, 'being other than white' or mental illness. The challenge Davis poses moves beyond how we improve prison conditions to questioning why particular people are there in the first place, whose interests it serves to keep these groups locked away and why imprisonment rates are escalating so rapidly?

Davis exposes the many complex and symbiotic relationships and interests that are served with an apparent need to maintain and expand prison populations. She outlines disturbing evidence of the massive expansion of western industrial prison industries in the last few decades. In California, for example, there have been twenty one prisons or similar facilities built since 1980 - compared with only nine built in over one hundred years between 1852 and 1955. An increasing number of prisons are touted as 'supermax' facilities, enabling maximum-security features such as permanent solitary confinement and sensory deprivation on a massive scale. Substantial evidence is also provided of the rising corporate dependence on prisoners as a source of cheap labour, and the lucrative business opportunities for private prison operators. We are confronted with the stark conclusion that the modern prison industry is shaping up as the twenty first century version of slavery with all its racial implications. The United States is leading the way with its prison facilities holding just under a quarter,

or two million, of the world's nine million prisoners. In contrast, Davis also points out that this growth in prison numbers closely followed a decline in US crime statistics.
It is chilling to consider the growing number of people, mainly distinguished by their social and economic status, that are being caught up in the economic and workforce demands of prison-related industries. *Are Prisons Obsolete?* demonstrates how the rhetoric of rehabilitation has been long forgotten in the plethora of news reports, films and series focusing on crime. This in turn bolsters the burgeoning security industry and the focus is on persuading the populace that it is in their economic interests to create enough criminals to fill prisons as well as on convincing the wealthy that they need to invest in their own protection. The media is also complicit through its racial profiling of criminality, operating to reinforce pre-existing racist fears and prejudices. In addition, as Davis reveals, a cynical use of equal opportunity principles is deployed to ensure that conditions are just as harsh for women as they are for men with one US prison claiming the doubtful honour of introducing chain gangs for women.

While *Are Prisons Obsolete?* is largely based on the US experience, Davis confirms that many countries are following their lead. The Sisters Inside international conference held in Brisbane in November 2003 featured Davis as a keynote speaker, and there were particular resonances in her research for local audiences. A country originally colonised for the purpose of offloading the overflow of British prisons, Australia is culturally poised to accept imprisonment as normative practice. Prisons in Australia also contain disproportionate and increasing numbers of Indigenous people. Even the shocking revelations of the Deaths in Custody report released in the early 1990s in Australia have done little to stem the tide of Indigenous incarceration, and many of the recommendations of this report have never been implemented. The Australian government continues to accept currently dominant US ideologies with alarming ease, contracting US corporations to run both supermax facilities and detention centres specifically built and designed for refugees, who are held without trial or any limits on their detention.

Are Prisons Obsolete depicts a world that may very well supersede the grim realities depicted in nineteenth century Dickens novels, but it also offers the groundwork needed for change. Within the critique are solutions. Foremost of these is rethinking our reliance on prisons, questioning their status as eternal and inevitable structures within any society. Reinvigorating debate from the core, Davis states that reforms have largely failed due to an inability to envisage realistic alternatives. Prisons should only be a phase in progress toward better, more humane forms of conflict prevention and resolution. Strategies such as improving prison conditions or even decriminalising drugs, providing health, welfare and education safety nets and restorative justice alternatives must continue - but all need to be informed by the ultimate aim of prison abolition. Modifying the worst excesses of the criminal justice system often acts to support rather than challenge current doctrines. In *Are Prisons Obsolete?* Davis shifts the entire axis of the reform agenda to a nexus for genuine long-term solutions.

Sisters Inside Inc. is an independent community organisation based in Brisbane, which exists to advocate for the human rights of women in the criminal justice system in Queensland, and to address gaps in the services available to them.
<www.sistersinside.com.au>

For more information on Seven Stories Press visit: <www.sevenstories.com>

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The Unimaginable Australian

Ghassan Hage, *Against Paranoid Nationalism: Searching for Hope in a Shrinking Society*, Pluto Press, 2003.

Reviewed by Peta Stephenson

Ghassan Hage's latest book could perhaps best be described as a loose collection of essays united by a sense of disillusionment with contemporary Australian society. They range from a consideration of the dispossession of Indigenous peoples, the Tampa situation and the sometimes fraught relations between Indigenous and migrant Australians, to Palestinian suicide bombers, stalled Reconciliation and the politics of White Australian fundamentalism. If there is one common theme that underpins this rather disparate collection, it is that White Australians are now in a state of worry about the nation more than caring about it and their fellow citizens. Hage describes societies as mechanisms for the production and distribution of hope. In the Australian case, years of neo-liberalist policies combined with the globalisation of capital have meant that the majority of White Australians have lost any sense of hope they once held of achieving a better life for themselves and their children. Instead of being hopeful, Anglo-Celtic Australians are now anxious, suspicious and ungenerous. White Australia is currently experiencing an acute obsession with border control and with paranoid fantasies about the ability of internal and external 'Others' to seize control of the country. In short, worrying has become the dominant White Australian mode of expressing attachment to the nation.

As in his earlier publication, *White Nation: Fantasies of White Supremacy in a Multicultural Society*, Hage utilises psychoanalytic frameworks in conjunction with socio-political and economic approaches to understand the culture of worrying in Australia today. Unlike *White Nation*, however, in which Indigenous people only rated a mention (the book failed 'to incorporate the problematic representation of Aboriginality within White fantasies', 24), Hage's latest offering redresses this omission. For Hage, it is the White Australian refusal to acknowledge and confront the colonial past (and present) that 'explain[s] why we have become so ungenerous to the migrant and the refugee' (152). While Hage earlier excluded Indigenous subjectivities from the Anglo-'ethnic' binary dynamic, *Paranoid Nationalism* suggests that a triangulated vision of Indigenous-Anglo-immigrant relations is central to understanding this current anxiety. After all, as Ann Curthoys suggests, 'Immigration … whether British or non-British, European or non-European, lies within rather than *after* a history of colonisation, *within* the history of relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples' (172).

This currently pervasive paranoid nationalism is not a phenomenon specific to the Twenty-First century. Indeed, in his chapter 'A brief history of White colonial paranoia', Hage indicates that a White Australian culture of worrying is anything but new. In fact, White Australian nationalism has been structured by paranoia and an endemic hatred of the 'Other' since its inception. Cultural, territorial and racial anxieties about losing both the 'civilised' cultural identity thought to be particular to those with white skin, and the attendant fears of losing the land and its resources were driving forces behind the birth of the nation. The introduction of policies designed simultaneously to destroy the (cultures of) Indigenous peoples and to exclude non-white migrants (especially 'Asiatics') from Australia and

Australian citizenship is an indication of the level of anxiety in the White colonial imaginary. While White paranoia was marginalised (but not eradicated) in the post World War Two era, it has resurfaced since the mid-1980s and now occupies a central place in the White collective psyche. The return of white paranoia to centre stage comes in the wake of multiculturalism, reconciliation, republican debates and the rise of Asian immigration (to the highest levels since the introduction of the 'White Australia' Policy).

In particular, Hage explores the white Australian paranoia that resurfaced in response to Paul Keating's promotion of reconciliation with Indigenous peoples and greater cultural and economic engagement with 'Asia'. Hage's argument that Keating's advocacy of reconciliation rested on a necessarily Anglo-centric version of historical events is both original and compelling. Unlike most cultural critics who have praised Keating's Redfern Speech - in which he located the responsibility for the atrocities of colonisation firmly with White Australians - Hage asks us to take a closer look at the implications of such an act, especially in terms of migrant agency in the reconciliation process. It is Keating's usage of the pronoun 'we' in the guise of a national imaginary that Hage finds most objectionable. Decrying what he calls the 'undeconstructed effect of Keating's "we"' (90), Hage shows that Keating ends up reducing the multiplicity of pasts and historical memories to a single White Australian national memory. It is clearly nonsensical to expect Indigenous Australians or more recent migrants to be interpellated by this 'we'. The very idea of assuming responsibility for colonisation is 'still a coloniser's take on Australia's history, even when it is a repentant coloniser's take' (94). As Hage argues, the assumption that the trauma of the coloniser is the only 'Australian' history continues the process of marginalising the history of the colonised - even at the moment when 'we' try to acknowledge our culpability in it.

Such questions are of central importance in terms of migrant responsibility in Australia's colonial history. When more recent immigrants are asked to identify with this ostensibly national 'we', it is important to acknowledge whose version of history they are being asked to adopt. As Hage suggests, migration can be construed as a continuation of the colonisation process. Based on their shared location as non-Indigenous beneficiaries of invasion it might seem logical to position more recent migrants alongside 'settler' Australians. On the other hand, however, the assumption that migrants would identify solely with this coloniser's version of history overlooks the point that migrants (especially non-white migrants and refugees) might share many common experiences with Indigenous communities. While migrants are certainly capable of relating to Australia's history from within the imaginary 'we' of the coloniser, Hage argues that migrants might also identify with this country's history by 'contributing to a struggle for Aboriginal sovereignty' (96).

Unfortunately Hage's overly brief analysis of the fraught yet potentially productive relations between Indigenous and diasporic communities does not include a consideration of the very rich, complex and multifaceted flow of inter-ethnic, racial and cultural exchanges between these communities. Nor does his analysis acknowledge that such complex entanglements were a feature of the colonial period (as the recent *Lost in the Whitewash: Aboriginal-Asian Encounters in Australia, 1901-2001* demonstrates). Indeed, cross-cultural alliances between Macassans and Northern Indigenous peoples have existed on the Australian continent since the pre-invasion era. The cross-cultural traffic between Aborigines and migrants is not only demonstrative of what Homi Bhabha has labelled the 'impossible unity of the nation as a symbolic force', it is also indicative of the agency these communities have exhibited in the formation of collaborative unions that exist above and beyond the White nation-state. But Hage largely overlooks the political, social and cultural alliances that migrants and Aborigines have brokered and, in

this sense, privileges the Anglo-centred version of history that he exposes.
Hage's analysis might also have explored the considerable agency that Indigenous women, in particular, exhibited in the colonial era by forging cross-cultural unions with Asian, Afghan and other non-white men - unions prohibited by colonial legislation. Despite racist and discriminatory policies, many Indigenous women managed to remain with their husbands and partners as well as keep their so-called 'half-caste' children. But perhaps it is not so surprising that Hage has overlooked the specific experiences of Aboriginal women in his discussion of Indigenous/migrant alliances. Hage's work largely overlooks the specific role that gender plays in identity formation. He fails to incorporate any real assessment of how (Indigenous and/or non-Indigenous) women might experience the currently pervasive paranoid nationalism, and whether or not this differs from men's experiences. Are women or men more prone to worrying about the nation? Are 'we' more worried about 'Other' men or women? Hage's failure to identify how gender intersects with the current state of worrying is a significant limitation of his study.

Hage might also have provided a deeper level of analysis of the white paranoia that followed Keating's attempts to promote the twinned 'evils' of closer relations with Indigenous peoples *and* Asian communities. Aborigines and Asians have long existed in the Anglo-Celtic imaginary as the two markers of absolute racial 'Otherness' that have both constituted and delimited national identity and membership. It is hardly surprising that White Australians reacted so violently against those racial minorities that have long existed in the White consciousness as posing the greatest threat to white exclusive possession of the nation. Such an analysis would help the reader to understand that Pauline Hanson's targeting of Indigenous and Asian-Australians, in particular, as those who were intractably unassimilable was no coincidence. An analysis of the enduring anxiety that White Australians feel towards Aborigines and 'Asians' would have also added more weight to Hage's contention that contemporary White paranoid nationalism ideologically resembles White colonial paranoia. What Hage labels the 'irrational fears of territorial decolonisation' (62) that White Australians felt in the wake of the Mabo decision and the Labor government's 'Australia in Asia' campaign might well be 'irrational', but they have antecedents in similar fears that resonated a hundred years earlier.

Hage's answer to the defensive and worried nationalism that now pervades Australian society is the promotion of an ethics of care. While he analyses and explains the re-emergence of an obsessive worrying in the White Australian collective psyche in depth, his analysis of the ethics of care would have benefited from the same scrutiny. Hage's employment of the concept of gift giving and receiving goes some way towards explicating what an ethics of care might entail, but his analysis stops short of contemplating how this ethics might manifest itself in real terms. In Hage's analysis, compassion, hospitality and the recognition of oppression are ways that White Australians can give the gift of hope to marginalised people. But is hope enough? How would creating the illusion that things might get better change one's lived reality? Hage's analysis requires a fuller examination of the dynamics of power - power not just within politics and the economy, but at the level of ideology. Furthermore, 'hope' is not an entirely immaculate conception, but one bound up with the notion of expected goods. When free settlers first arrived in Australia it was with the hope of finding a better life in a Promised Land - a state of mind inextricably bound up with the capitalist myth of material progress. This was a hope that could only be realised through consumption (of land, labour and other resources). Hage's assessment of hope and its importance as a necessary ingredient of community risks being ahistorical. As such, it fails to consider what a non-ameliorative hope might look like and what kind of society it would produce. It does not broach the question of how we might achieve a kind of belonging that is not predicated on the endless deferral of pleasure.

Perhaps, as Hage asserts, what needs to be emphasised is a White Australian sense of situatedness. The precondition of a White Australian politics of recognition of migrant and Indigenous communities is a sense of knowing on whose land we stand. The point that needs to be stressed is that White Australians are *guests* (and were uninvited) in this country, and should act accordingly. As Hage powerfully argues, the social gift that non-Indigenous Australians have received in this country is derived from stolen goods (152). How can White Australians give the gift of hospitality to migrants and refugees if we do not embrace the fact that we are the recipients of a gift derived at the expense of others? According to Hage, 'until we choose to face and deal with the consequences of our colonial theft, it will remain the ultimate source of our debilitating paranoia' (152). How this might be achieved is left to the reader's imagination. But whether a treaty, Native Title, or other means are proposed for dealing with the ramifications of colonial theft, it is clear that any attempt to make reparation that continues to deny the humanity of Indigenous peoples only diminishes our own.

Notwithstanding the limitations discussed above, one of Hage's great strengths is his ability to expose seemingly innocent and taken-for-granted assumptions as ideologically motivated and grounded. He masterfully combines 'academic speak' with accessible and refreshingly down-to-earth descriptions of the everyday. For, as Hage indicates, it is here, in the everyday 'commonsense' world of the White Australian imaginary that we can begin to understand the psychic and material investments in the currently pervasive paranoid nationalism. Perhaps though, it is his considerable talent as a story teller and his ability to weave seemingly incongruous elements into a coherent narrative that guarantee Hage's ability to give the gift of his analysis to the reader. And it is because his story is one that is hard to acknowledge and own as an Anglo-Celtic Australian that it is a gift worth receiving.

Peta Stephenson recently completed a PhD at the Australian Centre at the University of Melbourne, where she is now an honorary research fellow. She is currently exploring the contemporary identification of Indigenous Australians with Islam.

Not Getting It

Anne Summers, *The End of Equality: Work, Babies and Women's Choices in Twenty- First Century Australia* Random House Australia

Reviewed by Diane Brown

It is hard to believe that a global conglomerate like Random House, would host a media event with Anne Summers in Sydney three months ago, at which everyone who attended was asked to sign a confidentiality agreement that whatever it was that they were about to hear was embargoed until Summers' book was released. Intriguing. Especially when the book in question is a study of women and equality in Australia. A subject I can't imagine the sales and marketing people at Random House getting too excited about.

It's been almost thirty years since *Damned Whores and God's Police* (1975) was published and near enough to a decade since the revised edition came out (1994). Thirty years ago Summers was a rostered worker at Elsie Women's Refuge in Glebe, established by women squatting in an empty house owned by the Church of England. She was also amongst those interviewed for the first women's adviser to an Australian prime minister in 1973. Many will recall the classic image of several women who applied for the position, posing for a photograph together on a bed in the motel where they were all staying. The thing that strikes me most about this image (then and now) is that it is Summers who wears a t-shirt with the clenched fist inside the women's symbol clearly visible. She didn't get the job.

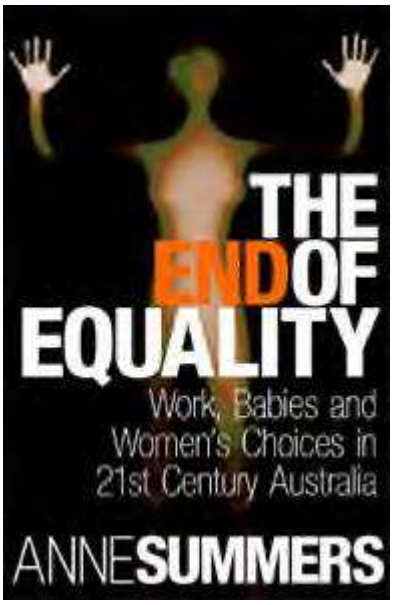
> *Feminism is derided as old-fashioned and no longer necessary because women today can do anything, right*? (140)

There is no doubt that the struggle to achieve better conditions for Australian women have been Summers' passion for a long time, even if many feminists don't identify with her liberal feminism and the way in which she has gone about her struggle.

What disturbs me about this new book are aspects of Summers' approach to the research. In her study she includes the narratives of around ninety women of childbearing age who participated in ten focus groups based in Sydney, Melbourne, Bathurst, Brisbane and Townsville. The latter group was made up of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. A Sydney-based private market research company was commissioned to conduct the focus groups. Summers' identifies her role as a non-participant observer over an astonishing short period (two weeks) in which the data was collected from focus groups. In preference to participation Summers watched participants through a two-way mirror and/or on a closed circuit television in Bathurst and, finally, in the room in Townsville. For those who take their human subjects and their feminist research seriously this methodology is flawed and it raises important ethical considerations. Also, why didn't she inform her subjects about the purpose of the research? I fail to see how this disclosure would have compromised the research or the findings, other than to make both more real.[1]

The title of Summers' new work is problematic because in order for equality to end we must have had it in the first place. I don't think this is the message that either Summers or her publisher intended. Not if we look at the image on the front cover or read the back cover blurb that clearly suggests women are going backwards. The title of Marilyn Lake's history of Australian feminism, *Getting Equal*, is closer to the truth.

The struggle for equal rights is over. We won. Mission accomplished. (2)



If only. In her introductory comments Summers writes of the politics of regression for women in Australia 'despite appearances to the contrary' and backs this up with some sobering statistics (3). For example, more Australian women work part-time than at any time in our past, and more than in any other country in the industrialised world. Hold on. Couldn't this just be about the choices women make? Not according to Summers who argues that it is a lack of support services for working mothers, such as childcare, that old weeping sore. Arguably, if women do get into positions where they have the potential to make a difference they don't have the ear of those who wield the power.

A case in point is Pru Goward, first appointed by John Howard as head of the Office of the Status of Women and later as Howard's Sex Discrimination Commissioner. As Summers' rightly argues Goward's appointments were a final nail in the coffin. Summers' own liberal feminist approach, however, would have us believe that government departments, such as the OSW, would really make a difference through the shaping of policy and legislation to advance the lot of women. Even when women have the ear of an Australian prime minister as Summers did, when she advised Paul Keating to 'thank the women of Australia' in his victory speech on election night, Keating took her advice, thanked them and promptly forgot about women (123).

When Summers argues that the women's movement 'is fragmented into a multitude of different groups and interests and lacks a coordinated national focus' (141) she needs to be reminded of just how easy it was for Howard to dismantle women's initiatives at a federal level, and also her own arguments on how easy it is to get rid of initiatives for women in one foul swoop, when they are centralised or homogenised. Despite the efforts of 'women's watchdogs in Canberra' (141). There is strength in the diversity of different groups and different interests that women have historically offered in their service delivery at a grassroots level. There is more to it than succeeding with government policy and legislative change. There is much more to women's equality than reforming the two major political parties. This is something that Summers tends to overlook in her own struggles to take women forward. Are women politicians valued? To answer that question we need only look at Carmen Lawrence's recent token appointment as ALP president.

> *Equal pay is a myth. Women are earning less, in relation to men, than they did a decade ago. Women's total average weekly earnings are just 66 per cent of men's*. (3)
> *There are more women living at the economic margin, or in actual poverty, than ever before*. (3)

Women still do not earn enough money to support themselves or their children. What about women who aren't working or, for that matter, who don't choose to have children for reasons that are other than economic? Significantly, the number of women totally dependent on welfare has increased to an unprecedented degree (3). The reliance of women on government support entraps them into cycles of poverty with downward spirals in which there are few choices when the context is always driven by

survival.

The new ideology, according to Summers, is the 'breeding creed' that has come about because of the government's panic response to the declining birth rate.

> *The breeding creed is a powerful new ideology that defines women first and foremost as mothers*. (7)

Of course the new ideology that Summers refers to is just history repeating itself in ways that disadvantage women by making it almost impossible for them to have children and also have a career. What is the alternative?

> *At least 25 per cent of young women today will end up not having children at all. For some this will be a matter of active choice*. (9)

What about legislative changes at state and commonwealth government levels? Summers makes an interesting observation that while there has been a marked increase in the number of women entering parliament, this trend has been countered with a 'roll back in women's rights' and a 'decline in women's economic well-being' (4). While Summers rightly or wrongly believes that change will take place again for women through political policy making and legislative change, she also notes that political rhetoric 'is out of whack with the reality of most women's lives'. If this is the case despite the increase of women in government, *why* would women trust or identify with politicians of any Party persuasion?

This was a key argument of Moira Rayner's in *Rooting Democracy* when she asked, 'How can we get the conversation going again?', 'Are there other ways of conducting our political life?' and 'Is the Party Over?' After all, how could we trust any political leader who argues that 'We are in the post-feminist stage of the debate'? as John Howard said about working women in 2002. Even if there were a critical mass of women politicians, the evidence suggests this would not make a significant difference. Summers asks; 'When was the last time the women of Canberra, on either side of politics, defied their leaders and stood up publicly to protect women?' (202). And even if they did, how long would they last and at what personal and professional cost? Especially in positions of *perceived leadership*. This is why I don't agree with Summers when she gives Jenny Macklin a serve (211-212) because Macklin made a personal and political choice to go for a portfolio of education, training, employment and science, instead of the deputy leader's traditional economic portfolio of shadow treasurer. My hunch is that Macklin has thought more about how she can strategically contribute to Australian politics than Summers gives her credit for.

Summers makes a fundamental link between sexual and domestic violence and equal opportunity for women. As we know, the vast majority of domestic violence, including sexual assault, cases go unreported and therefore do not appear in official statistics on the public record. Arguably domestic violence remains the single most urgent issue in Australian society today. To give credit where credit is due, this is borne out by Summers in her introductory comments, as it certainly is in other forums. For example, at this year's Australian Women's Studies Association conference in Brisbane, important and informed contributions were made to the ongoing debates surrounding domestic violence within Indigenous communities in Australia by Sonia Smallacombe and Fay Nelson.

In Summers's study many women see violence by men against women as a form of payback on the part of the perpetrator by cutting their women down to size. (78) In other words women have become too big for their boots. And child abuse was linked to alcohol or substance abuse and violence within the family. Women's refuges, Summers tells us, are always full and women are being turned away each night. While Summers draws on government and ABS statistics from various surveys, the problem is and always will be disclosure that would reveal a much more accurate picture of what is really going on. Still the statistics are sobering, including the fact that child abuse starts before the child has even left the womb when pregnant women are on the receiving end of abuse by the perpetrator.

> *When it comes to the broken bodies of Australian women, the only time the violence is routinely monitored is if they die. That is the grim measure of how women are valued in Australia in the early 21st century.* (83)

While Summers needs to be taken to task when she states that the experiences and opinions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women were sufficiently similar to those of other women in her focus groups as 'not to require special or separate mention' (14) the exception, it would seem, is domestic violence within Indigenous communities. Findings from a study by the Australian Institute of Criminology reveal that, of the 701 women killed in Australia by partners or other family members between July 1989 and June 1998, 132 were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders. These statistics are alarming if, as Summers claims, indigenous women only comprise two per cent of the total female population in Australia. (83)

In her comments about teenagers Summers argues that young Australian women believe that their lives are good, and that the younger they are the more positive they are likely to be. Try exploring this with teenagers who are doing it hard on drugs and are locked up in detention. Try telling the young woman in detention (not in this study) who was told by one of her workers that she'd have to wait another five years before the dentures she'd accidentally lost would be replaced, and that life is 'pretty good', 'a lot better than before' or 'you can do what you want'. (22)

And finally we arrive at Summer's concluding remarks on how to restore equality. I'll go straight to her call for women to demand of government that it establish a Royal Commission into the Equality of Women in Australia. I'm wary of this way forward because I think that many women (and men) do not have faith in Royal Commissions and their outcomes, even if they do have unique powers and compel evidence. Probably the most important and compelling contribution they make is to raise consciousness and political awareness about particular issues.

Summers' last chapter 'Acting Up' reminds me of her 'Letter to the Next Generation'. Both ask women to play a proactive and powerful role in shaping their future. In her 'Letter' Summers urges the next generation to never lose sight of the fundamentals for women (527). In 'Acting Up' Summers lists ten ways to change the world that many feminists would reject because the list relies too heavily on party politics and trying to effect change from the inside of political institutions that, for so many women for so long, have not delivered. Her listed contacts include the prime minister, federal members, main political party websites, women members of the House of Representatives listed by state, women senators, watchdog organisations for discrimination complaints, state women's advisers and women's organisations. There is also a list of support services for sexual violence and domestic violence. Summers' endnotes are useful for others researching in this field. Her reading list is too short and some important books are not there. For example, under the category of Law, Justice and Crime, Jocelynne

Scutt's *Women and the Law* (1990) is not included and it ought to be, even if it hasn't been revised since it was first published.

Clearly, Anne Summers feels that she and all the women of Australia have been duped and she is absolutely right. *The End of Equality* is important in contributing to debate about these issues and in trying to put them back on the agenda, even if it feels to me like a book that has been too rushed for the sake of getting it into print.

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1 My thanks to Renate Klein for her thoughts and valuable discussion on focue groups.

Broadening Horizons

Rita Felski, *Literature After Feminism*, The University of Chicago Press, 2003

Reviewed by Rachel Slater

The title of Rita Felski's book is a self-conscious and interesting choice. It brings to mind the image of literature as a survivor of war; bloody, battered, and a little shell- shocked - but still standing. This depiction is close to the heart of many literary critics (not surprisingly mostly male) who regard feminism as having launched an attack upon a brave but ultimately helpless canon - handsome, honourable and too precious to be sullied by *politics*. A long held belief that literature can be read as art or as politics but never both, colours their arguments against feminism.

It is precisely this overprotective and under-examined view that Felski deconstructs in her latest book. Utilising her drollness and energy, she wryly observes in her introduction that feminists are apparently 'bitter, hostile, resentful and utterly irrational' (1). Feminists, 'do not only hate men; they also loathe literature…Feminist critics, we are told, are dour, humourless ideologues who reduce complex works to one-dimensional messages and crude expressions of an author's social bias'. What follows is a defence of feminist criticism, a deconstruction of the either/or, politics versus aesthetics school of thought and a fairly even-handed assessment of the relative merits of various feminist approaches to literature.

Felski organises her argument around four key ideas; Readers - do men and women read differently? Authors - how have feminist critics imagined the female author? Plot - how does plot relate to gender? Values - how does feminism address the relationship between literary and political value?

It difficult to argue with the statement that gender shapes how we read, but what does it actually mean to read as a woman? History would have it that women are emotional, sentimental readers and consumers of mass culture. Felski asserts that feminism has transformed our sense of what it means to read as a woman and draws on a wide range of feminist critics to expound her theory. Judith Fetterley's 'resisting reader' is invoked to describe the experience of reading the American canon as an exercise in identifying as male, for the female reader is required to identify against herself, forcing her to question the literary and cultural heritage of the work. Reading female authors, however, allows for a less defensive reading and a different engagement with the texts. Felski also finds sense in the visual logic concept of 'analogy', a process of finding similarity in difference. She quotes Barbara Stafford, 'only by making the past, or the remote, or the foreign proximate, can we hope to make it intelligible to us. Analogising has the virtue of making distant peoples, other periods, and even diverse contemporary context part of our world' (16). So, a work needs to connect to us in some way in order to be successful. It does not however, need to reflect our own social statistics (and in this sense is not universal) and Felski is quick to point out that race, class and culture have an impact on the way women read and, indeed, write.

In dealing with the author, Felski charts the history of authorship from the 1970s and the 'death of the author', through the (by now well-worn) discourses of the mad women in the attic, masquerading women, and home girls. The section examining the 'madwoman in the attic' takes us through Victorian literature and female characters' sense of enclosure and entrapment. Felski praises Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's feminist readings of this subject, observing that the madwoman reproduced the author herself. Madness was frequently the Victorian middle-class woman's only escape and freedom; her defiance against patriarchy, a rebellion embedded in her sexuality and rejection of silence, despite the

'anxiety of authorship'.

'Masquerading women' is an allegory of authorship presenting literature as a veil, rather than a window, through which we try to view the female soul. Part of this obscuring of vision is women writers' willingness to embrace sexual ambiguity. This process is explicated by Judith Butler's work on gender and identity and other proponents of queer theory. Knowing that gender is a product or art rather than nature, women writers can mimic the male perspective and thus subvert male authority. In this light, identity is performance, with authorship the space in which to act.

The 'home girls' trope has come to represent those black women in the USA who make the link between feminism and maternal bonds, a generational 'connection between the black woman writer's sense of herself as a part of a link in generations of women, and her decision to write' (80) according to Mary Helen Washington. Felski maintains that black women writers have a different perspective on the home. It is not a space of female dislocation and desperation but rather an environment that offers respite from labour and engenders strong female relationships.

When examining plot, Felski again takes us through history, looking at traditional plot and myth - with women wholly excluded as main characters or heroes. She acknowledges that, in attempting to redress the balance, women writers cannot simply drop a female character into a male plot but must rework the story to fit the new protagonist. She draws on diverse examples such as the detective story, novels by Margaret Atwood, and mother-daughter relationships in order to make her point that women blend tradition and innovation, pleasure and critical reflection, in order to forge vital new fictions of female identity.

Felski ends her book with a chapter on values and the discussion around aesthetic versus political value. It is an emotive subject, with critics driven to states of awe and inspiration by the works they read. Richard Rorty for example, claims that great literature is about 'taking the world by the throat and insisting that there is more to this life than we have ever imagined' (138). He, and others like him, feel that literature has fallen on hard times, and accuse contemporary criticism, and feminism in particular, of spurning aesthetics. Felski shows quite clearly that debates over value have not disappeared, but that they continue to deploy aesthetic and political judgements. Felski wheels out the big guns in her defence of feminist criticism, selecting Virginia Woolf (an obvious choice) as an example of canonical woman writer and feminist. Woolf became canonical through recognition of her artfulness, and this lead to many readings of her politics. The point is well made and Felski ends her work on a high note of 'double vision', with feminism leading the way in the combined reading of texts valued for aesthetics *and* politics and suggesting to the reader that there may be more to literature, at least, than she could imagine.

There were three sites of conflict in Felski's book for me. The first problem is that in her eagerness to present a 'united front' as a defence against criticism, she draws a veil over all the divisions within feminism, with the result that it comes across as almost monolithic. Whilst this structure may support the main line of her argument it is disingenuous, and a slight to the multi faceted and creative field of feminism.

The second area I take issue with is that we are warned time and time again, that generalisations are dangerous and should be avoided; whilst it is important to look at the bigger picture and espouse theories and methods of criticism, we must be careful not to turn these into hard and fast rules about

how women do or should write/read etcetera. This is a valid and well-taken point, but it is made too often and gives the reader the sensation that she is being spoken down to by an over-zealous schoolteacher.

The third complaint I have is that Felski does not give enough time to the issue of class in her examination of feminism. She talks frequently of black feminist criticism and black women's writing. She examines fairly closely lesbian readings of literature and their responses to the movement of feminism history and is serious in her examination of Third World women's writing and criticism. This is both necessary and enlightening. However, I feel that the writing, reading and criticism of working class women, as well as class-focused approaches is somewhat short-changed. Of course, it is mentioned in passing, during one of her numerous warnings about the dangers of sweeping statements, but for most of the book the question of feminism and class is not raised. The topic does comes up in a roundabout way when Felski addresses the issue of literary value and makes the compelling statement that there is nothing *natural* about loving literature, that value is acquired and learned, using Willy Russell's, *Educating Rita* as an example. Educating Rita is a fantastic novel and a great film, but it was written by a man and presents a stereotypical, if sympathetic, view of English working class women. Felski uses it as an example to demonstrate that the ability to create or read aesthetic and/or political value in literature is not innate but learnt and, therefore, some people are better than others at connecting with and translating its complexities. For this purpose it works well. She does not however attempt to bring working class women into any other areas of her discussion, a decision or oversight I found very disappointing.

That said, *Literature After Feminism* is a witty and engaging book. Felski does not assume a great deal of prior knowledge of feminist literary criticism, or, indeed, feminism - and yet maintains a scholarly and serious approach. She successfully invalidates the stereotypical portrayal of feminist critics as harridans and hard-hearts, delineating the skill and passion that feminist critics have brought to the study of literature. Perhaps most importantly she demonstrates that feminist readings of literature can open our eyes to literature, increasing rather than diminishing our appreciation of the beauty and subtlety contained within.

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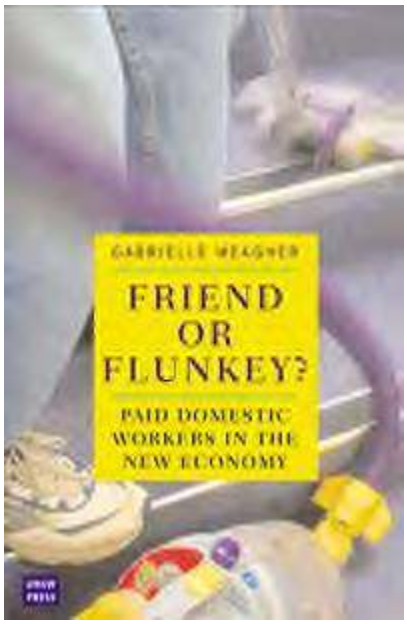
Wages for Housework

Gabrielle Meagher, *Friend or Flunkey? Paid Domestic Workers in the New Economy*. University of New South Wales Press, 2003.

Reviewed by Lise Saugeres

This book is an insightful account of the domestic services industry in Australia, focusing particularly on the experiences of paid cleaners, housekeepers and carers in Sydney. By examining how paid domestic workers experience their work, Meagher seeks to answer three main questions: first, whether the growth of paid housework would be able to restore full employment in contemporary societies; second, whether paying for housework frees some women while exploiting others; and, third, whether domestic tasks should be bought and sold at all. It draws on fifty interviews focusing on people's working lives and work histories.



Throughout the book, Meagher's emphasis is on giving paid domestic workers a voice and enabling them to tell their stories. The opening chapter, entitled, `Doing Paid Housework: Participants' Voices', introduces the diversity of paid domestic workers' experiences and perceptions of their work. In the next two chapters, Meagher defines paid domestic housework and locates her study within broader debates about employment trends in the new service economy, the relationship between gender relations in the labour market and the household, and racial/ethnic differences between women.

The ways in which paid domestic workers fit within the larger industry of Australian domestic services and the occupational structure of the labour market, the relationship between domestic workers and householders, and the different ways in which paid domestic workers enter and leave the industry are explored in chapters three to six. In chapters seven and eight, Meagher examines the ways in which individual strategies of resistance, market-based institutional strategies, and collective action. The concluding chapter seeks to answer the question whether it is wrong for people to pay for housework.

Meagher's *Friend or Flunkey?* draws on political economy to explore the relationship between social structures and workers' experiences of paid domestic labour. As such her analysis takes into account intersections of class, gender and ethnicity. She examines feminist theories which argue that paid domestic labour simply expresses and reproduces gender, class and race domination and claim that, accordingly, paying for domestic labour is wrong. She also examines theories of post-industrial societies that are concerned with the future of work and the emergence of a servant class. Meagher argues for the need instead to explore the complexity and diversity of the workers' experiences, as well as the personal and institutionalized strategies that could improve the situation of paid domestic workers.

Meagher draws on the concept of careers to explore people's different paths in and out the domestic work industry. In doing so she is arguing that not all domestic workers find themselves trapped in dead-end exploitative low-paid jobs, for some workers are able to use paid domestic work to help them

achieve their life goals. Out of her data, she distinguishes five `careers' in domestic service provision. First, the stop-gap for student career. Here the domestic workers were students who did paid domestic work a few hours a week for only a limited period in order to supplement other income through flexible casual work. These students usually stopped doing any paid domestic work once they graduated and were able to choose other jobs. Second, paid domestic work could be used as a stepping-stone to other kinds of work: either the kind of domestic work they performed was preparation for related work in the future (especially in the care sector) or provided an economic stepping-stone which was compatible with the pursuit of future goals such as for example starting their own business in a related field. Most of the people in this group liked the flexibility of paid domestic work and did not want an office job. Third, the filler according to Meagher was the most common `career' into paid domestic work. Here, people entered domestic work because they could not find other work opportunities at the time and/or it fitted with family obligations or other paid work. Their future prospects however, as well as the role that the income they made from paid housework played in their lives, were very diverse. Fourth, some of the people interviewed saw domestic service as an actual career option. These workers tended to enter the industry because of perceived positive attributes of the work rather than because of a lack of other opportunities. They were people who either preferred to work full-time in domestic work rather than being in an office environment, or had started as domestic workers and then decided to operate domestic service agencies. Fifth, for some respondents paid housework was a `dead end'. They tended to be migrants from non-English speaking countries, over forty years of age; they would have preferred other kinds of work but were unable to find it, usually because they did not have very good literacy and/or language skills. Employer racial discrimination could also be a factor here.

Meagher disputes the argument that the domestic services industry relies on the existence of a servant class. She shows that domestic workers can have upward mobility by moving either outside the industry or within it in finding positions within private firms or business like franchise operations that hire workers. She argues that, hence, for many domestic workers the occupation is not a `ghetto'. However, she acknowledges that it is much more difficult for domestic workers from socially disadvantaged groups to be upwardly mobile both within and outside the industry and that these disadvantaged workers can often find themselves trapped in some kind of `a ghetto'. She also acknowledges that it is women and/or migrants from non-English speaking countries who constitute the core of paid domestic workers.

Meagher argues that, as many feminist analyses of paid housework have shown, domestic workers resist domination and refuse to be treated like servants through using various individual strategies of resistance. But she also argues that, as long as feminist analyses do not explore collective strategies of resistance such as professionalisation and organisation, they will continue to perceive paid housework as `a uniquely lousy job'. She does, however, concur that even when domestic workers are able to negotiate contracts within market norms by being hired by agencies or other companies or institutions, they are still faced with both the economic and cultural devaluation of their work. Indeed, the fact that domestic work generally is still seen as women's work, and as such is devalued, effects its economic value. At the same time, because domestic work is still seen as part of caring and, thus, a natural part of femininity, it is difficult to commodify housework in the same way as other wage work. Even though professionalisation can help to improve workers' conditions, its success is still limited because of the social stigma associated with domestic labour. She shows that companies attempting professionalisation of paid domestic work also tend to exclude more disadvantaged workers. Drawing on examples from the United States and Sweden, she argues that unionization of paid domestic services and what she calls `solidarity-based strategies' could be a way forward in order to improve the services

industry.

Meagher reviews the arguments that view paying for housework as being morally wrong. She argues that paid housework is not necessarily more exploitative than other forms of contemporary service work. She argues that it is not unethical to pay for housework if we pay houseworkers well and treat them with respect. She claims that it is wrong to presume that domestic employment necessarily assumes having somebody at our service and thus in a subordinate position. According to Meagher, in order to establish respectful relationships we need to enter into `a contract for service' rather than `a contract of service' - one in which the boundaries around the job and the personal relationships are well defined and agreed upon by both parties. She talks about a `double-bind'. On the one hand, markets for domestic labour exist because of inequalities of gender, ethnicity and class, and the hiring of houseworkers reproduce these inequalities. On the other hand, if people were to stop buying housework for ethical reasons, first, it could have a negative impact on the buyer as it is usually women who hire domestic workers to relieve some of their domestic responsibilities. Second, it could render people who do this work more economically vulnerable since, even though it is low paid, menial and mostly casual, it is still a flexible and easily accessible way of making an income.

Meagher's study is interesting, well-documented, thought-provoking and informative - and particularly valuable because it explores the relationship between micro and macro structures. It does so by looking at how domestic workers as active agents can negotiate and contest personal exploitation while also operating within unequal power structures and cultural values that keep the most vulnerable sections of the population in disadvantaged positions. This analysis is located within feminist debates about housework and other academic debates around the future of work.

However, I have criticisms in two main areas. First, the `double-bind' of paid domestic labour that Meagher discusses is an old dilemma. There is little doubt that within the existing power structures, refusal by householders to pay for housework because they think it is ethically wrong could have very negative social and economic consequences for people who do paid housework. Equally, as evidenced here, paid domestic workers are not all trapped in dead-end jobs. As seen, Meagher discusses the unequal power relations, social and economic injustice and exploitative aspects of paid domestic labour, but she rejects feminist claims that academic women who hire houseworkers - who are usually other women and often from ethnic minorities- are reproducing social inequalities.

Indeed, her main conclusion is that it is not wrong for people to pay for housework, that being a paid houseworker is not necessarily a lousy job, and that a householder does not necessarily oppress and exploit paid houseworkers if they treat them with respect. I find this argument inherently flawed. I would argue that in the current existing social and economic conditions and power structures, the relationship between the householder and houseworker is one of power and subordination regardless of the respect with which the worker is treated. This is because domestic workers would not be doing such work in the first place if they were not disadvantaged economically, socially and/or culturally at the time regardless of whether they are able to eventually find better jobs or not. Similarly, it is only householders who are in relatively privileged positions who hire houseworkers. This is not simply because they can afford it financially but also because they have the social and cultural capital which enables them to do so.

Second, Meagher engages with feminist debates of housework and theories of post-industrial society to inform her analysis. However, it is somewhat surprising that a study of paid domestic workers, which

inevitably addresses the issue of exploitation, does not engage with Marxist theories of unequal relations of production.

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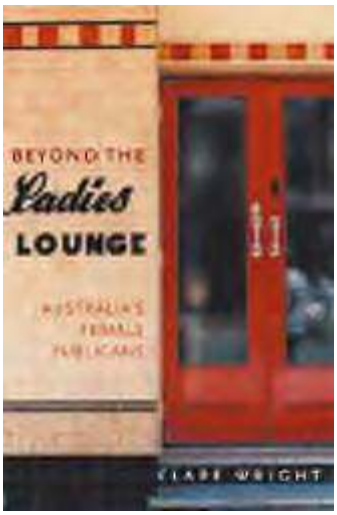
Behind Bars

Clare Wright*, Beyond the Ladies' Lounge: Australia's Female Publicans,* Melbourne; Melbourne University Press, 2003
Christine Trimingham, *Growing Good Catholic Girls: Education and Convent Life in Australia* Melbourne; Melbourne University Press 2003.

Reviewed by JaneMaree Maher

Both *Beyond the Ladies' Lounge* and *Growing Good Catholic Girls* explore the stories and experiences of Australian women whose lives did not follow conventional patterns of mothering and domesticity. Wright's book presents the history of the female publicans of Victoria from the mid 1850s until the present day, examining the legal and social conditions that enabled this group of women to gain a degree of independence and prosper in the liquor industry. Trimingham Jack details the lives of nuns and students at the Society of the Sacred Heart boarding school, Kerever Park in New South Wales. Both authors locate their historical accounts in critical discourses of gender, and are interested in how prevailing gender norms intersect with other institutions and social, educational and legal structures.



In *Beyond the Ladies' Lounge*, Wright carefully documents the history of female publicans in Victoria, beginning with her identification of the surprisingly high number of female publicans in the hospitality industry at the end of the nineteenth century in Victoria and continuing through to oral history accounts of contemporary female publicans. She locates the stories of these women in the social and legal conditions that supported their presence in that industry. Wright's insightful analysis of gender norms, that might have suggested a great distance from the hurly-burly of pub life for women but lead rather to the close connections she describes, is a critical strength of this engagingly written account. As Wright notes, gender norms of propriety and decorum, not generally associated with alcohol, formed the basis of these women's recognized propensity to 'keep orderly houses' and thus resulted in a relatively high number of female license holders. In later times, she documents 'the ["grande dame"] version of female propriety adopted by female hotelkeepers' (p.187) to control clientele and premises.

Wright examines the role that the 'financial perils of wife desertion, economic depression and social dislocation (p. 43) played in facilitating the development of women in the liquor industry in contrast to other countries. She examines how women in the late nineteenth century in Australia came to hold licenses, and examines the lack of support for widows, which precipitated a number into the profession of publican, often in the goldfields where 'sly-grogging', with its minimal requirement for start-up capital allowed otherwise vulnerable women to take up a pursuit that would offer an opportunity to earn some money. She explores the differences between the 'theoretical equality' (p.37) consequent upon the passage of Married Women's Property Act in 1870 and the actual ability of women to amass property and gain financial security. She suggests, when examining the difference in how American liquor licensing practices and laws developed at the turn of the twentieth century, that 'female hotelkeepers were at the apex of the industry at precisely the time when that industry was at its most socially, culturally and fiscally influential' (p.49). Wright's comparison of the Victorian situation to those prevailing in other Australian states shows the importance of specific attention to location and local politics in interpreting and describing how gender norms and constructs impact on groups of

women. Wright explores international and other domestic regimes where single women were excluding from license holding and compares them to Victorian system, which focused rather on age, and then on excluding female barmaids, in the early twentieth century.

Beyond the Ladies' Lounge also explores the various social and legislative responses to the perils represented by independent married women and single women in the role of the female publican, at different historical periods. Her account of the Minogue decision in 1884, where the holding of liquor licenses by married women was temporarily cast into doubt, and the relatively swift legislative response to ensure that this situation did not prevail and exclude many respectable women from their legitimate and well-established pursuits, reflects the importance of placing legislative responses in broader contexts of economic and social imperatives.

Wright explores the licensing reduction scheme in the early part of the twentieth century, where the number of public houses was dramatically lessened through a process of compensation. Although many women were disadvantaged in this process, Wright suggests that 'there is no pattern of overt or oblique discrimination on the basis of gender' (p.73). She also examines the history of the Licensed Victuallers' Association of Victoria (LVA) and its variable response to female publicans across its history. She identifies the usefulness of the image of 'female publicans as kind-hearted, sweet-natured, maternally disposed, honest and industrious' (p.81) in the LVA's battle with the forces of temperance in the 1920s. She also explores the career of female publicans who used the springboard of activism in the trade to move into political offices such as State Parliament.

In *Beyond the Ladies' Lounge*, Wright contests the seeming invisibility of women in twentieth century public houses, charting the dissonance between the definition of Australian pubs, particularly during the days of the six o'clock swill, as locations for the expression of 'an overtly masculine style of engagement: hard, fast, loud, competitive and gender-exclusive' (p.115), and the recollections of female publicans who worked to combine raising families in the inner sanctum of the pub with their professional activities in the house. She argues that some women were able to use their place as publicans as a platform for community work, suggesting that the movement between the public and private spheres, and the particular 'feminine' virtues inherent in the work of the female publican were instrumental in this movement.

The strength of Wright's text lies in its textured account of the female publicans' stories. The narratives and insights of the contemporary female publicans are given great weight, and they are presented in conjunction with a nuanced and careful account of the social, legal and cultural contexts in which these women worked. *Beyond the Ladies' Lounge* convincingly accounts for the rebuttal of the expectation of deviance that could have been attached to the work and name of female publicans. Instead Wright argues that this role can be read as a culturally celebrated one. '[Female publicans] have been painted as adventurous, enterprising, resourceful, resilient and fearless. Yet those qualities are always matched with an equally "feminine" set of virtues: compassion, generosity, self-sacrifice, dignity and modest adornment' (p.169).
Growing Good Catholic Girls too documents the lives of women who did not follow usual paths and choices. Christine Trimingham Jack explores the social and cultural production of femininity in the Catholic education system in Australia, specifically in the Kerever park boarding School run by the Sisters of the Society of the Sacred Heart. Trimingham Jack's exploration runs from the 1940s until 1965 when the boarding school was closed down. It gathers the accounts of pupils, nuns, lay sisters and workers at the school, seeking to reveal the educational, social and religious norms that implicitly and

explicitly underpinned the structure of boarding school life throughout these postwar decades. Trimingham Jack seeks to examine the particular social and cultural aspirations, of parents and teachers, that shaped the educational practices she experienced as a student.

There are interesting and important issues that are raised and Trimingham Jack seeks to explore the 'interplay between social class gender and religion' (p.116) that mediated the educational experience of these young women and how they later came to see this experience. The questions of class, detailed in the accounts of home and the trajectory into boarding school for young catholic women, especially those whose fathers' professional status put them in predominantly non-catholic environments, are important ones in understanding the history of sectarianism in Australia. This is particularly so as it recedes in meaning and relevance in the twenty-first century. Trimingham Jack suggests that the intersections between appropriate religious norms and middle class values formed an important aspect of how schools such as Kerever Park fitted into the social structures and aspirations of Australia at that time. She engages with the practices of teacher training at Kerever Park, and their relationship to other structures of teacher education, in order to explore the specificity of catholic educational practice.

But overall, the account doesn't expand to fully explore the connections of society, religiosity and gender norms that *Growing Good Catholic Girls* announces as its object. There are many promising lines of inquiry that are not followed up; what difference did the European Catholic precepts embodied in the Founder, whose life Trimingham Jack identifies as a particular object of study of reflection for the women at Kerever Park, have in a country where the very different Irish Catholic tradition was popularly understood to hold sway? What meaning and importance did these differences have in the threads of resistance that Trimingham Jack identifies in the narratives of both religious and pupils? Given that there are a number of other Australian convent schools sharing some of the characteristics identified, such as the Order of Faithful Companions of Jesus at Genazzano in Victoria, which also ran a boarding facility at the same time as Kerever Park, it would have extended the scope to consider what insights from these locations could have added to these proffered here. Situating the history of Kerever Park in this broader context would have given more weight to the convent life experience in Australia that the subtitle claims.

Both the texts reviewed here fit within a tradition of feminist historical practice, in which gender analysis and historical research are combined to produce new histories and new insights into prevailing social and cultural accounts. They explore institutions that have shaped Australian life experience, and Australian women's experience in those institutions in particular. *Growing Good Catholic Girls* documents one such institution and outlines some promising lines of inquiry. *Beyond the Ladies' Lounge* offers a rich and important account of what women were doing in the public houses that were central in the development of white Australian society. In taking the myth of the Australian pub and so successfully complicating the gender narratives that are generally located there, Wright makes an important contribution to rethinking historical accounts of the development of the Australian nation and the role of the pub in understanding the Australian character.

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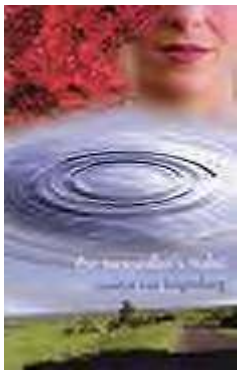
Travelling Borderlands

Carolyn van Langenberg, *The Teetotaller's Wake*, Indra Publishing, 2003.
Reviewed by Shé Hawke

The Teetotaller's Wake is a complex multi-generational narrative that slips between the generic borderlands of fiction, fact and myth. It tells the tale, not so tall but very broad, of the lesbian main protagonist's homecoming. Fi Hindmarsh is depicted as an undisciplined, contrary, needy but intelligent, materialistic dyke who is less than thrilled with the necessity of traversing the uncanny terrain of homecoming from Sydney. The home-coming-site is Newrybar in the Byron Bay hinterland.



Carolyn van Langenberg provides a different representation of this otherwise trendy Northern Rivers location. The Newrybar of the Hindmarsh/Dark clan remains considerably unchanged over generations, except in the way various members use the Arakwaal land that has been 'settled'. The menacing Uncle Harry is still touching up the little girls of the family, Auntie Lydia is still 'mad', and so it goes. For Fi Hindmarsh, a timely defection to the city is the only tangible change. Fi was always a 'girl' who wanted more than the backwoods atmosphere of Newrybar could offer or accept. Fi had always been a woman lover, even before her violation by less-loved male relatives, as the book narrates.

Newrybar represents the spatial homecoming. However, on arriving 'home' to honour her estranged mother's death. Fi Hindmarsh is drawn into a web of memoir and myth that precipitates a homecoming of another kind.

Parallel to the homecoming theme, the text speaks most importantly about under representation, the stories of subjects and people less spoken of in the western historical and literary tradition. Van Langenberg pays homage to representations of women, lesbians and indigenous cultures of the Northern Rivers of NSW. I pluralise these terms intentionally for several reasons but specifically to ask as does Luce Irigaray in *When Our Lips Speak Together*: "Why only one song, one discourse, one text at a time?…what about truth's other side?'

In relation to the region referred to by settler society as the Northern Rivers, van Langenberg pays homage to the existence of a rich indigenous cultural diversity within the Bundjalung Nation. Wiyabul territory is one of the two tribes represented in the book, the other being the Arakwaal tribe. By naming and locating these tribes linguistically, culturally, spiritually and geographically, van Langenberg plucks indigenous specificity out of a broader Aboriginal homogeneity inscribed by a western homogeneity that has almost successfully obscured tribal particularities. As she pertinently states in the notes at the end of the text: 'The Bundjalung are as different from the Darug of the Blue Mountains, for example, as the Irish are from the English,' (229).

Carolyn van Langenberg writes with integrity and a sense of ethics that does not engage in cultural appropriation but that re-tells edited story; her poiesis is sensitively written and is representative of another side of truth through the evocative medium of fiction, history and myth. She does not identify herself as anything other than the author, influenced by a settler heritage and considerable research into the specificities of the Bundjalung Nation. In terms of positionality, van Langenberg succeeds in writing 'outside of the lived experience', in relation to the indigenous and lesbian themes in the story, without invoking oppressive 'isms', instead, actively and ethically writing characters from outside the

western heterosexual, male cultural imaginary. *The Teetotaller's Wake* is fundamentally a woman's story, a very current example of *a* feminist, post-colonial text, *a* representation of the multiplicity and plurality of *feminisms*.

Further, *The Teetotaller's Wake* is not just a fiction that disrupts perceptions of the everyday. As a 'faction' , it engages in some of the performative work of the Cultural Studies project, by critiquing entrenched power relations within a 'settler' community, thereby 'unsettling' the historical record. Although presented primarily as a fiction, the story of Fi Hindmarsh, throws an uncomfortable light on the Dark Clan and the struggles of the women within it, ordinary story that would not otherwise be documented historically, a lineage of story that has largely remained untold.

Fi Hindmarsh was once a barefooted, backwoods girl who removed herself from geographical and familial 'home' by steely will and deep desire to pursue anonymous city life, tertiary education and sensible shoes! On her return 'home', van Langenberg describes her as a black trousered, recalcitrant oddity. Fi Hindmarsh always knew who she was and who she was meant to become. Being made a female victim in early childhood does not prescribe victimhood as a woman. Fi's timely defection from the claustrophobic, incestuous family is her saving grace and enables her to find a sense of 'home' in her own being. She is no stranger to herself, just a stranger to her family of origin.

Stylistically, van Langenberg writes from omniscient third person narration, with an ongoing undercurrent of sexual tensions that add intrigue and pace to the narrative. *The Teetotaller's Wake* is a passionate and enthralling narrative, strewn with clever inverted clichès, steeped in overdrawn tea, littered with the idiosyncrasies of loved and not-loved relatives, lost and found in memory, and sweetly haunted by the indigenous myth of the Wiyabul Man. As Maria Simms of *LiNQ* says on the dust-cover, about van Langenberg's previous work *fish lips* (2001) 'It's a real *tour de force.'* So too is *The Teetotaller's Wake,* the second in the trilogy.

Shé Hawke has completed her honours at Southern Cross University and is beginning work on a PhD.

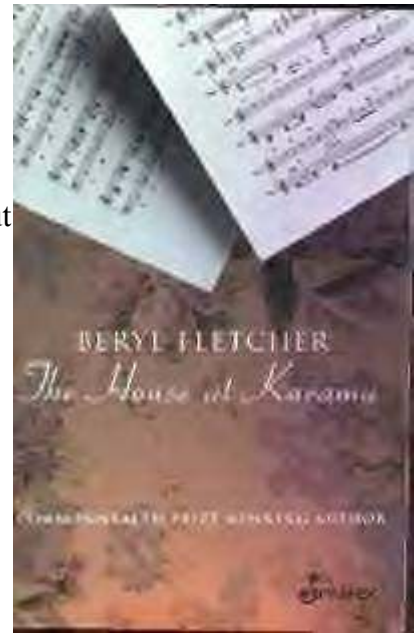
A Yarn Or a Documentary? No, Autobiography

Beryl Fletcher, *The House at Karamu.* Spinifex, Melbourne, 2003

By Jasna Novakovic

When you finish the last lines and close the book, the feeling you are left with is really powerful. Like after reading a mighty novel. The story of woman's growth liberates and should be a gripping narrative to everyone, regardless of gender. Like any terrific story.

But that is not how it began. The first chapters of Beryl Fletcher's autobiography *House At Karamu* read like a documentary translated into literary form. Its subject matter is memory, and what is recorded in it is a personal experience of a child. That the issue at the heart of her recollections is the family and the variety of gender roles within the socially prescribed patriarchal model of it does not come out, because the narrative jumps from one scene to another with fondness but no sense of that commitment to a clear-cut theme usual in a socially and politically engaged work of literature. Perhaps it is not intended to be this. Perhaps it is meant to be what it is: a cherished string of pearl-like images that call to life the long-dead people and places sublimated into a sense of security and personal integrity. New Zealand is a fragmented background to this kaleidoscope, a soundboard for the author/hero's recollection of her mother and father, her elder sister who was her chief playmate and their younger siblings, and of her extended family; then her school trials and tribulations, pictures of her neighbourhood, her bitchy behaviour informed by spite and envy. Usual stuff, one should say, to the effect that documentarism overrides a literary depiction of a girl in the grip of imagination which dictates its actions and shapes her response to the outer world. Fletcher is obviously proud of her memory and her ability to reproduce in detail some moments from her earliest childhood, but the conjured images lack emotional depth to give them literary value.



No child is aware of adult issues and Fletcher was right in not foregrounding any. But that was the literary problem that had to be solved. For, by the end of *House At Karamu*, a woman's liberation issue emerges as the main point, the reason for the book. Fletcher tried to add flesh to the bones by structuring the first part of her autobiography as a modernist work. Its narrative shifts from the present back to the past, but this method is merely a technical device and, moreover, it has become a hackneyed tool after elaborate exploitation in modern literature. The parts of the obtained mosaic thus strike the reader as rather ordinary family medallions cherished only by its members. There is another superfluous formatting device: Fletcher changes the size and type of the font whenever she moves on to a different setting inhabited by different characters. This looks merely like a cosmetic touch or, perhaps, an editorial input - as if she wanted the form to drive the narrative, but the method was neither ingeniously reinvented nor its elements powerful enough to make it work. As a straightforward reproduction of a child's perception, the fragmented narrative lacks analytical penetration, the detail that points to the pattern shaping the whole picture. The returns into the present do not dispel the rising feeling of contrivance. The sense is of a rather clumsy attempt at accommodating a tribute to the university for its support of the book, the loving care for an aged and increasingly frail, yet fiercely independent father who was that rare specimen of a working class intellectual, and her minutely

detailed yet somehow futile recollection of her childhood. No sense of a deeper sense of the truth of one's self or of the New Zealand society in the 1940s to 1960s evolves. Worse, *House At Karamu* seems to provide all the answers and leave no space for reflection.

Wrong. The revelation, however, starts appearing only once Fletcher abandons her method of shifting narrative and resumes the traditional, linear form of story telling. Strangely, the transformation happens when she leaves her happy country, the land of her childhood, and comes to Australia. A foreign land seems to have liberated her senses, true existential struggle has awoken her feelings, her social protest is untamed by acquiescence. In other words, the autobiography takes up when it comes as close to a novel as one can get. It simply becomes a good yarn. Short encounters inserted into the main fabric of the marriage theme provide compelling insights into the social habits and cultural idiosyncrasies of the 1960s Australia, Sydney's King's Cross, the outback and the treatment of Aborigines. Galvanised by the emotional energy of personal unhappiness and the excruciating hardships of bush life, they conjure a picture of a culture as well as a personal drama that lingers on the reader's memory long after the book has been shut. Because the journey from the self-denial informed by love as well as inculcated femininity as nurturance to self-awareness and the sense of self-worth has a much more general relevance. It shows that liberation need not come in the way of motherhood nor any other traditional role of woman that she herself finds fulfilling.

There is material for wonderful novels in Fletcher's autobiography. It certainly makes one wish to read her books of fiction, all of them, to understand better the personal myth of the house at Karamu.

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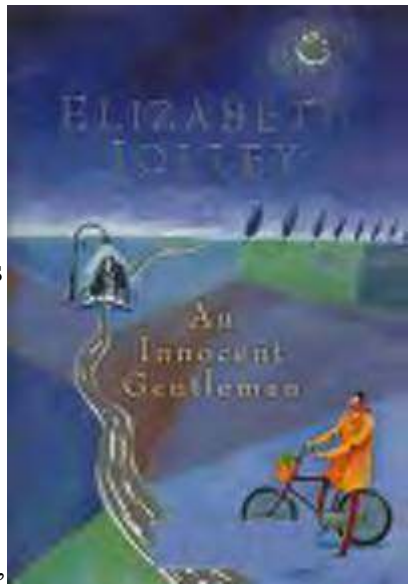
Living in a Box

Elizabeth Jolley, *An Innocent Gentleman*, Penguin Books Australia, 2001.

Reviewed by Rachel Slater

Elizabeth Jolley's latest novel focuses on Henry and Muriel Bell and the friendship they forge with Mr Hawthorne (Muriel's well-to-do student) in a low-income housing estate in the English industrial Midlands during the World War Two. It is a deceptively simple story, but still waters run deep, and the ordinary lives presented are soon shown to be anything but.



Upon opening the novel, the reader is immediately confronted by a cast list, a 'Dramatis Personae', followed by an unidentified exclaimant who rails against "Mr Hilter" and never-again-heard Scottish voice who wants hush so that the story can be told. This strange collection is perhaps a reminder that, although set within limited boundaries, geographically and otherwise, difference is essential to the story, with relationships between the characters not as simple as they may first appear. It may also be a comment on the notion of character, and this is borne out by a narrator who shifts from calling the characters 'Henry and Muriel', to 'the Mother and the Father' and then 'the Husband and the Wife'. This rather unusual approach to narrative continues throughout the novel with a linear plotline shot through with passages from canonical writers including Wordsworth, Thomas Mann and Dostoevski. These borrowings from literature work to great effect to highlight individual versus societal roles and the limitations of personal fulfilment. We are also presented with cited notebook jottings, repeated passages and this slightly unsettling technique has the effect of making the reader feel that she is viewing the story from different angles, zooming in for a close up one moment, only to find herself viewing the scene from a great distance the next. The author's creation of the 'multi reader' allows us to see all sides of the relationships she builds between the characters, and, by default, the multi faceted class system they represent.

All the characters in this novel are class-bound. Caught in the mire of the English class system, with very little hope of movement, the characters adapt in different ways. At the very bottom of the pile is Victor, homeless, lacking any formal education and consistently failed by the system that aims to protect him. At the next level we have the Tonkinsons, working class women (and perhaps 'working girls'?) whose bawdy humour and warmth attract and appal Henry and Muriel in equal measure. Henry, by dint of his education and good manners, is one step up from his neighbours, yet he remains working class and, despite his admiration for Mr. H, is not possessed of the seething ambition to move up in the world that preoccupies Muriel and her mother. Muriel is firmly middle class and desperate to better herself. She believes she comes from better stock than Henry and has pretensions that far outweigh her possibilities. Their children, a product of this mixed marriage, are destined by the imposed limits of gender and their parent's narrow horizons (girls should be educated differently from boys) to live their lives within the same confines as their parents. This leads us to Mr. Hawthorne, often referred to as 'Mr Gentleman', at the apex. He, and the social position he represents, is often reached for yet never fully attained and those below him on the social scale treat him with an outdated reverence, conferring upon him' Lord of the Manor' status. This is a rank he lives up to by taking his dues and sleeping with and

impregnating his 'tenant's' wife. He appears to suffer no shame or guilt for this act and does not change his lifestyle to any great degree in order to accommodate the consequences. Unsurprisingly, that burden falls upon the ever obliging Henry.

Henry's continued respect for and admiration of Mr Hawthorne, despite his affair with his wife, is an example of the crippling power of class distinction. Despite the musings in his note book, Henry is left inert by his ideas of his station in life and the invisible boundary that he must not cross, whatever the provocation. Rule-bound by societal and personal codes of conduct, the stifling control that characterises this tale reaches from the demanding silence and darkness of the blackout to discreetness regarding a spouse's infidelity.

Whatever their rung on the ladder, all these characters remain boxed in by their social position, unable to free themselves from what appears to them to be the vast unmovable obstacle of class. Mr Hawthorne is no freer from the responsibilities imposed by his status than Henry; each is unable to act, nullified by what is accepted as the natural order of things. It is ironic that, despite the absence of the roof of his mouth, Victor is the only character in the novel capable of real expression. He is the only one who can reveal fully his inner feelings and torments, for example when Muriel threatens to send him back to the foster home, 'His cry was like the cry of a desperate animal caught in a trap'. He is the rescuer of guinea pigs and babies, forgiving in the face of Muriel's brutal treatment and is the only truly innocent, gentle man in the story.

Jolley is famous for her well-wrought female characters and the novel's portrayal of gender roles welcomes a feminist reading. In trying to understand Muriel it helps to examine the character of Henry. He is not a man of his times and, although sensible and meticulous, not conventional. He is tolerant and thoughtful, we are told that he does not disapprove of homosexuality, for example, a fairly radical stance in 1940s Britain. There is a suggestion of course, that this unprejudiced stance is due to his own sexual attraction to the boys he teaches and to Mr Hawthorne, providing another of the many challenges to compulsory heterosexuality that can be found liberally sprinkled through Jolley's work. He adheres to his principles of social responsibility, easily offering Victor a bed for the night. Although he places his faith in government institutions, he is not governed by societal mores, which insist that a woman's place is in the home. Henry cooks and cleans and cares for the couple's two daughters. He encourages openness, honesty and sexual freedom in their marriage, despite the pain it causes. He is pleased that his wife takes pleasure from music, opera and language and works hard to ensure she has time to herself. That is not to imply that Henry is without fault. His keeping tabs on Muriel's menstrual cycle, enabling him to chart which would be her 'better nights, when desire was intense', is disquieting to say the least. He 'allowed his wife seven items on her dressing table' and 'wanted to know, every minute, what she was thinking about' and this denotes a sense of ownership, his desire to possess Muriel, impinging on her self image and her private thoughts.

Muriel feels claustrophobic in her narrow, dull life with her husband and children and their small house with its "mean little hall" and the housing estate with its unfinished roads leading nowhere. She longs to climb the social ladder to a different and 'better' life. Her affair with Mr Hawthorne (his social status ensuring he is only ever addressed with the respectful prefix) offers her a glimpse of the potential. Inside her cramped existence, she "unpacks" her thoughts of their time together - thoughts that have been boxed away in her mind for moments of private contemplation - and makes it possible for her aspirations to soar. Muriel is basically silly and self-indulgent. She refers to her children as 'brats' and observes with some distaste 'How irritating they were when they hung onto her clothes'. However she is

a strong female character in the sense that she allows herself to admit that she needs more fulfilment than her sugar coated domesticity can offer and, at times, despises the life for which she has settled. Through her own demands and by exploiting her husband's overbearing sense of concern, she is able to make some room in her confined world to express her identity as separate from her marriage and children. In this she is a far cry from the ideal 1940s British wife, finding a hidden piece of herself in extra marital sexual fulfilment and a promise of a different life.

Alongside this portrayal of the socially ambitious and potentially self-determining Muriel are the 'Tonkettes'. They are strong, independent women, in control of their own destinies. There is no 'Mr. Tonks' and he is not missed. This mother and daughter duo are a curse to Muriel and a blessing to Henry. In fact, Henry gains more than friendship from his neighbours and during one visit Mrs Tonks asks, 'Full massage is it? Or just a quick relief job to clear away the cobwebs?' before her hands search his 'one-woman-virginity'. Her flippant tone suggests this is not the first time. Mrs Tonks takes payment for these services in the form of black market sherry, home grown cabbages and other war-induced scarcities. She is sympathetic and intelligent, quoting Shakespeare when trying to comfort Henry. Their accents and their poverty ensure they will never escape their housing estate existence, but the Tonkettes' vivacity and wit mean they will continue to rise above it.

Mr Hawthorne is the least developed of the characters since he serves mainly as a foil to the other members of the cast, highlighting the tensions of class and economics. Mr H may be cultured and romantic in the eyes of our infatuated couple, but he is still constrained by a very English sense of propriety and subtlety. At the end of the novel we see him visiting his son more as a kindly uncle or tolerated beneficiary than as a father and we realise that he has lost a great deal, more than his elevated status can make up for.

This is a classic Jolley novel, in style if not in content. Both gently comic and mildly disturbing, the characters are finely wrought and their relationships delicately observed. Its failings however, lie in the reader's sense that the writing is a little tired. Jolley has not produced the haunting sense of unease that comes with *The Well*, nor the potency of the characters within it. *An Innocent Gentleman* is not possessed of the insidious charm of her earlier novels and is lacking their vigour, failing to fully engage the reader. Jolley does succeed in skilfully conveying a sense of ordinariness and inactivity whilst more extraordinary things go on in both the background and the foreground of the story. The novel ends on an optimistic note with the protagonists brought together around the new baby, but by this point the reader is only too aware that the paradox of happy families is what lies beneath.

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Digital and Other Pleasures

Barbara Creed, *Media Matrix: Sexing the New Reality*. Australia; Allen and Unwin, 2003.

Reviewed by Kim Toffoletti

Writing about 'the media' is a tricky business. Too often it is portrayed as a static, undifferentiated mass, acting upon an equally abstracted 'society'. Individuals and social groups are powerless under the glare of the media spotlight. In her new book *Media Matrix: Sexing the New Reality*, Barbara Creed challenges this perception through an exploration of 'the changes brought about by the new forms of reality' (3). By coupling the terms 'media' and 'matrix', the author contests the perception of a monolith of mass communication. She argues that 'the traditional media, while seeking to undermine boundaries, are simultaneously always drawing new ones…the virtual media, however, offer the possibility of traversing boundaries altogether' (4). By treating the term as a range of diverse technologies of communication, entertainment and information with fluid boundaries, the media is made dynamic, rendered as a complex web of global interconnections that transcend the limits of the self, nation and culture.

So too is the subject's experience of the media rethought in *Media Matrix*. Rejecting the Frankfurt School's frequent categorisation of popular culture as an opiate of the masses in the service of capitalism, Creed celebrates the power of readers and viewers to engage with cultural forms in a dynamic way. For Creed: 'The key question becomes not what the media *do to* the individual but what the individual *does with* the media. The modern subject is thus, I believe, positioned as an active participant in his or her encounters with the media' (8). This is in keeping with Roland Barthes' concept of the reader as active in the production of textual meaning. Creed shares Barthes' approach to the text as a source of pleasure where multiple meanings reside. Critics of a post-feminist position might be uneasy with this emphasis upon individualism, yet Creed is committed to empowering the self (particularly the female subject) in a way that stresses the adaptive and transformative nature of both the subject and the media. Through the analysis of a selection of virtual, visual and literary texts including Mills and Boon novels, cyberstars, television programs such as *Sex and the City*, *Big Brother*, *Queer as Folk*, and the coverage of the September 11 terrorist attacks, Creed explores the ways in which meaning is located at the intersection of texts and viewers, and the contexts in which these engagements occur. In doing so, she offers the possibility for new articulations of identity and the social beyond traditional humanist formations.

The association between the matrix and the feminine do not go unnoticed by the author. Like feminist theorists of technology Donna Haraway and Sadie Plant, Creed forges an alliance between the feminine and the technological in order to reconsider gendered dichotomies such as public/private, global/local, nature/culture and high and low culture. In stating that 'the media have truly emerged from a matrix, a point of origin which is definitively female' (5), she reclaims the global, public domain as female space. In this respect, hers is not a resisting subject. Rather, Creed demonstrates how women take pleasure in various media forms. One such example can be found in the chapter 'Women and Post-Porn: *Romance* to Annie Sprinkle', where the representation of female sexuality is addressed through a consideration of women's relationship to pornography. Catherine Breillat's 1999 film *Romance* forms the basis of the chapter, in which Creed deftly argues that *Romance*, and various other provocative films made by women, 'take pornography out of its traditional context and rework its stock images and scenarios from a female perspective' (74). By championing a post-porn feminist aesthetic, Creed revises traditional

formulations of pornography as made by men and for men. In a visual world where the distinctions between pornography and popular culture are increasingly blurred Creed offers the possibility for women to assume the position of 'active desiring subjects' (74) in relation to representations of sexuality on the screen.

Indeed, *Media Matrix* establishes at its outset the long and prosperous relationship between sex and the screen. Early chapters investigate this coupling through Creed's notion of the perverse gaze. The perverse gaze is, according to Creed, 'a form of looking that has always been present, though not always acknowledged' (18). It describes the way viewers look at the salacious, pornographic and taboo, from the early days of the moving picture to the present day. Their fascination with sex and violence has always been present, Creed suggests, an interest that stems from the abject and voyeuristic. 'What is new', she says, 'is the way in which perversity is constructed by the modern mass media, from film to the Internet. The early modern desire to encounter new, shocking forms of behaviour has intensified' (20).

It is an argument that goes against a postmodern version of image culture, in which the over-exposure, acceleration and proliferation of images elicits a desensitisation to the shocking, and a numb response to the hyper-violent and hyper-sexual. Through her study of the interaction between the spectator and the screen, Creed shows us how the cinema maintains its ability to shock by operating on multiple levels as a space of both fantasy and reality, as a site of memory as well as taboo. By approaching the media as a historical, social, personal and discursive construct, *Media Matrix* offers readers a fresh and sophisticated insight into our fascination with the perverse and taboo, themes that underpin Creed's consideration of the contemporary phenomenon of reality television and Crisis TV.

Creed's knowledge of psychoanalytic theory, wielded with such savvy in her 1993 publication *The Monstrous Feminine: Film Feminism and Psychoanalysis*, is again on display here. Along with Julia Kristeva's writing on the abject and Michael Bakhin's theory of the carnivalesque, Freudian psychoanalysis frames an understanding of the modern subject and how he/she is constituted by the media and representation. For example, in an engaging study of *Sex and the City* Freud's interpretation of taboo is deployed by the author to consider how the program 'represents a new sexual permissiveness for single women while simultaneously regulating the limits of these changes' (52). Indeed, it is a preoccupation with limits, borders and boundaries that underpins Creed's approach to media and subjectivity more generally.

As traditional formulations of the media, the subject and the social are radically altered by new technologies, Creed seeks an alternative model of the self, more suited to negotiating a diverse and ambiguous media landscape where public and private, real and virtual, are no longer clearly delineated categories. What she proposes is the global self, 'a virtual, transformative and empowered self with a global political and social agenda' (194). She challenges a line of thinking that positions the subject of the virtual age as a passive participant. In particular, the media theorists John Fiske and Kenneth Gergen are critiqued by Creed for constructing 'the individual as an unwitting victim or object of scrutiny by the new media and Internet' (192). The concept of selfhood she advocates is more in keeping with Sherry Turkle's vision, a subject that takes pleasure in engagements with technology and the transformative subject positions that may ensue.

The book comments further upon the writing of such scholars through a complex interweaving of Internet discourse, globalisation theory and ethics. For Creed, 'in these discussions of identity and the

self, very little attention was paid to the politicised self and the ways in which the Internet could empower those who sought to address problems of global social justice' (193). By injecting the issue of social justice into studies of the cybersubject, Creed offers another model of the subject that takes into account the way in which alternative media can be used productively by individuals to foster global social movements. The global self is empowered by technology, active in his or her relations with the global, virtual world, and embraces change, ambiguity and indeterminacy.

Creed tantalises the reader with a brief overview of the global self at the book's outset, only to return to the idea more fully in the final chapter, 'The Global Self and the New Reality'. In some respects it is a fitting conclusion, in that her analysis of virtual technology neatly completes a chronology beginning with early cinema, and working through more established media formats such as film, the romance novel and television. By closing with a discussion of the global self, Creed leaves us with a powerful vision of the subject and its engagements with the heady new terrain of the media matrix. At the same time, this discussion of the how self is understood and lived in the age of new media frames what has come before and could just as easily have introduced the study.

One of the issues faced by many scholars who write about popular culture is the ephemeral nature of cultural texts and trends. I write this review while basking in the afterglow of *Australian Idol*, in the thrall of trashy Summer programming like *What Not to Wear* and *Extreme Makeovers*, and keenly anticipating the Australian version of the US program *Queer Eye for the Strait Guy*. Although much of what makes *Media Matrix* so appealing is its engagement with TV favorites such as *Queer as Folk* and *Sex and the City*, trading on popular culture currency also risks these ideas becoming quickly outdated, bypassed by newer, sexier topics and texts. Creed avoids such mediocrity through solid scholarship that not only speaks to a cultural moment and its historical precedents, but anticipates the kinds of engagements that can be forged in this new reality. For example, her discussion of the queering of popular media speaks powerfully to the abovementioned programmes through the notion of the carnivalesque.

I mention this not to criticise Creed's content, but to applaud her ability to weave her subject matter into the continuum of screen history and theory. Working across old and new material (various chapters are revised and updated versions of previously published articles) enables Creed to highlight the continuity and shifts in how viewers' respond to various media and understand the self in relation to new forms of reality. *Media Matrix: Sexing the New Reality* succeeds in encouraging the reader to think about engagements with the media beyond traditional formulations. The pleasures, desires and fantasies of the screen are given new meaning through Creed's lens of empowered femininity.

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Seeing through Educatainment

Louise Morley, *Quality and Power in Higher Education*, Society for Research into Higher Education and Open University Press, 2003.

Reviewed by Maryanne Dever

Louise Morley, widely published on questions of gender, power and empowerment in higher education, was recently in Australia to deliver the annual Clare Burton Lecture nationwide and this book expands on her theme in that lecture. In *Quality and Power in Higher Education* she examines the power relationships that underpin quality assurance exercises in universities. It is based on a qualitative study undertaken in a selection of higher education institutions in the UK, but there are clear parallels and lessons for Australia and this is what makes the book at once compelling and depressing reading. Morley writes with a clarity that is enviable and a passion that is admirable. But it is her capacity to read the current changes within the higher education sector through the lens of contemporary political and social theory, and situate these changes within the context of globalisation that makes her account so persuasive.

Morley is quite clear that she is a supporter of the idea of greater transparency within systems of higher education and, while critical of the way higher education is being re-engineered through processes like quality assurance, she has little tolerance for 'golden-age-ism'. Indeed, she reminds readers at various points of how little separates the 'good old days' from the 'bad old days'. Nevertheless, she is sceptical of the capacity for exercises such as the Teaching Quality Assessment ones in the UK to deliver on their central claims to enhance the quality of the 'higher education experience' for students. She repeatedly points to the irony wherein the very processes put in place to ensure quality have in fact undermined it, with the audit exercises often entirely displacing the activities being audited. The most obvious example of this is the way time and labour intensive quality assurance exercises in fact take time away from teaching and from students. 'A noticeable feature of my research', Morley writes, 'is that no informant actually cited improved teaching or enhanced disciplinary knowledge as outcomes of quality assessment.'

Those interviewed for the study also make the point that quality assurance processes have tended to enshrine mediocrity, now that innovation and creativity in curriculum or pedagogy look potentially risky in a world governed by universal standards and benchmarks. And how things look is all important. The overwhelming emphasis, as Morley's informants make clear, is on the textual manifestations of quality: mountains of paperwork prepared and stored 'just in case' an audit team might like to see it. The costs of fulfilling audit requirements are hard to measure, but they are clearly taking a larger and larger part of the smaller and smaller funds available to public institutions, particularly as more and more staff are employed to meet the audit requirements. Indeed, it is suggested that universities in the UK are now responding more to the needs (and demands) of auditors and funders, than their 'users'.

Turning to the question of the 'users' of higher education, Morley's chapter on the student-as-consumer is particularly insightful as she addresses both the pressure on academic staff in a user pays environment to ensure client 'happiness' and 'satisfaction' ('educatainment') and the emergence of those same student-clients as sites of fear and danger lest they not perform their happiness satisfactorily before the visiting audit teams or in the all-important unit evaluations. In scenes more suited to a 'Carry on Quality' film, informants told of students being 'coached' in mock reviews before meeting the real

audit teams, while unhappy or disgruntled students (especially internationals) were quietly eliminated from the meet-and-greet party.

Even more compelling is the chapter on changing employment regimes where Morley points out that universities as recipients of public funds are now viewed as akin to welfare recipients and like traditional welfare recipients they and their staff are subject to harassment, surveillance and demands to account for the way they spend their time. Following this analogy, our AQA audits will really just be giant dole diaries. The audit culture, moreover, is also a long-hours culture where overwork is good work. In addition to the longer hours regularly resulting from the need to produce auditable documentation, Morley's informants talk of working eighty-hour weeks in the run up to audit visits and the gender implications of these workloads are more than apparent in the stories of women staff farming out their children for the duration of the audit preparation period. 'Quality production and reproduction', it is suggested, 'are in oppositional relationship.'

Despite the fact that both feminism and quality assurance have each sought 'to deconstruct and reconstruct the academy', Morley argues that quality and equality are not in fact happy partners in this process. The counter-hegemonic scholarship on higher education (of which feminist critiques have formed a part) has had little impact on the development of quality assurance, and while some women have been successful in forging careers in the new quality management sections within institutions, in general equity issues are not given priority when measuring 'quality'. Moreover, the audit systems themselves tend to reproduce the familiar gendered division of labour wherein teaching quality is seen as the 'women's thing', while men remain securely entrenched in the research quality area of the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE). Morley concludes by pointing to the fact some of her informants do indeed find positives in the quality assurance system: it offers them new career opportunities and new paradigms for thinking about academic work. For others, the quality experience is about managing processes rather than standards, and has led to suspicion, mistrust, and considerable waste. Yes, Morley argues, we do want 'quality', but we need to expand the conceptual language of quality and find systems to deliver it that work with, rather than against, the academic values we wish to foster.

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Same the Whole World Over?

Susanne Thorbek and Bandana Pattanaik (eds.), *Transnational Prostitution: Changing Global Patterns*. Zed Books, 2002

Reviewed by Samantha Shaw

Transnational Prostitution: Changing Global Patterns explores and compares sex work in various parts of the world, following this with discussion and research drawn mainly from the last ten years. Editors Susanne Thorbek and Bandana Pattanaik acknowledge the myriad stances on prostitution, a continuum of policies ranging from legislation to abolition, then state their own aims. Their primary goals are to describe sex work in different locales, to challenge hegemonies in global discourses on the sex industry and then, crucially, to push for 'more humane policy and contribute to a less exploitative world order' (9).

Geographically diverse, *Transnational Prostitution* covers Thailand, Barbados, Australia, Germany, Denmark, Spain, Morocco, Canada, The Netherlands, and Sweden. Its contributors present researched findings from their region of interest, then sum up the industry, and the discourses and terminologies in that region. Collectively, these chapters point to changing global patterns particularly in so far as income disparity and the unlevel playing fields affect sex industries.

Devoted to globally evolving discourses around sex work, the book is in four parts: Men in Prostitution; Migrant Women in Prostitution; Critical Reflections and New Policies in Prostitution.

Men in Prostitution

Discussion on men as the consumers and sellers of sex, is an excellent starting point. The editors group the findings where sex work truly *does* begin, with the purchaser. Thorbek and Pattanaik postulate that 'men as customers in prostitution have historically been ignored both in public debates and in legislation' (2) and organise their first two chapters to describe *desire* as the source of prostitution. The writers for Part One - Ryan Bishop, Lillian S. Robinson, Thorbek and Joan L. Phillips - describe the 'old notions of race, class and gender' (28) exhibited by the consumers as well as how postmodern life conditions account for the fabric of current global sex worker patterns. The psychology and hegemony of the *purchaser* in prostitution, is analysed throughout Part One.

Chapter One opens rather drearily with the internet sex diaries of male tourists returning from Thailand. Bishop and Robinson note evident but seldom discussed elements of male sexuality seen in these voluminous entries - the alienation, hostility, contempt and half-conscious dehumanising of an exploited "other". Whether the reader sees these net entries as ego driven boasts, or as a privileged consumer advisory board, they serve as sexual services advertising for the Thai government. Prostitution is officially illegal in Thailand - but there are 800,000 sex workers there, compared with 700,000 registered teachers. While cyberspace inadvertently replaces the function of a tourism department for the Kingdom of Thailand, it gleans $4 billion per annum from its non-existent sex industry.

This chapter explores 'men as consumers', in this and other nations, their isolation and alienation, their misogyny and women blaming, their perceived right to obtain sex (oral sex for $5, intercourse for $20) from Third World women that they cannot access in their home countries. Dominant ideologies are repetitively self evident in the self righteous ramblings on the net - the entitlement, the dehumanising,

the conspiratorial warning and well wishing to other users, all through the net medium. The writers explain that these guides show consumers 'how to avoid being exploited while engaging in the act of exploitation (15). Praise or derision for the service provider indicates 'no fully human sex worker exists for the client' (19). Postmodernity introduces a new element to sex for money…bragging about it on the net. Bishop and Robinson describe the men's talk as the 'discourse of the privileged', with hollow pretensions to democracy. The entries are 'self referential, and ever emanating from the dominant subject position' (20). Deep deception operates in cyberspace. Bishop and Robinson elucidate how the pretension to liberal ideals of free will, autonomous equal actors, free markets and inalienable rights to self fulfilment that accompany transnational capital and marketplaces is demonstrated in these male consumer maunderings. The authors lucidly conclude 'thus the financial crisis in southeast Asia, that has wrecked national economies and left hundreds of thousands starving, with millions more teetering on the brink of abject poverty, merely translates for the internet diarists into making Thailand an even better bargain for the sex shopper' (20).

From the genre of electronic communication, Chapter Two explores the European inheritance and its cultural 'making' of masculine sexuality, with its myriad ingredients to global male hegemonies. Thorbek gives a brief history of the biological determinism prevalent in the nineteenth century, accompanying social histories of imperialism and colonialism. Historical theorists in many fields are outlined as an explanatory grounding to the notion of male 'sex right' Importantly, Thorbek includes the evolving cultural racisms, (globally) which laid a framework for the multitudinous factors making the global sex industry patterns that are evident today.

Men as sellers of sex (apart from the pimps, organisers or leeching hangers-on) gives a balancing twist, and provides a useful comparison to the bulk of the book. Chapter Three explores the 'entrepreneurial' male sex workers of Barbados. This essay debates whether sex roles are *truly* reversed when a man sells his sexuality. Joan L. Phillips depicts the beach boys of Barbados, who seek wealthy women clients, as clever opportunists. This sharply contrasts with the victimhood assigned to trafficked women in sex worker studies, or the moralistic tone evident in studies such as those by O'Connell, Davis, Jeffries etc. Gender bias towards the male sex workers in Barbados is clear considering there are very few studies on female prostitutes that describe the sex seller as an admirable opportunist. Phillips writes that the beach boys 'consciously decide to undertake the innovative enterprise assuming risk for the sake of profit' (45). The perspectives and contributions of Part One frame the heterogeneous hegemonies around men in prostitution.

Migrant Women in Prostitution

If sex work is arguably 'reproductive labour', the next five chapters, highlighting aspects of trafficking women to Australia, Germany and Denmark, raise many issues of transnational class and race.

Linda Meaker explores the history of Asian sex workers (most prevalently from the Philippines and Thailand) to Australia's southern capitals, then outlines recent events and policy on migrant women in Queensland. The experience of the migrants, contrary to much anti-trafficking discourse, is loosely consensual, although the debt repayment scheme to bring them here leaves workers open to exploitation. The bulk of this chapter describes the efforts of SQWISI in assisting stranded or exploited migrant sex workers. Sex work, domestic service and factory work are the mainstays of migrant women's employment globally. Meaker outlines the specifics of SQWISI in helping sex workers graduate to other work avenues, or improve their working conditions. She asks for community acknowledgement that sex work is a path to independence and a solution to poverty for many women,

and argues that support, safety and dignity should be afforded them.

Pataya Ruenkaew writes of a measurable increase in Thai women migrating to Germany in the past twenty five years, and does a cultural exploration on why migrant women's numbers from the third to the first world are growing. She notes Truong's hypothesis that German society requires third world women to 'undertake activities that German women will no longer perform' (82). Thai women who go to Germany tend to be older (often in the middle-aged 40-60 years age group) and comprise many single mothers, unmarried younger women, and universally, lower middle class women. Amid this diversity in Thai migrant workers to Germany, runs the common element of *dissatisfaction* with their lives, and their economic prospects, in Thailand. Chapter Six also explores Thai sex workers in Germany (Hamburg), with the difference of specific case studies and individual workers' experiences. There are Thai community groups in Germany. Prapairat R. Mix reports on the findings of Amnesty on working conditions for migrant sex workers, and cultural comparisons between the First and Third worlds.

In Chapter Seven, Anders Lisborg explores the outflow of Thai women, specifically to Denmark, their migration patterns and living conditions. Amid his work, well written and referenced with graphs and multi-sourced references to other studies, one interesting fact emerges: that many Thai women in the sex industry in Denmark were not trafficked, or did not seek European sex work positions from their home country, but came over with a 'returning tourist'. This was usually a boyfriend or client with whom a longer term relationship had been struck. Variations on 'giving up sex work' to migrating with a view to continue in a Western country appear; critically though, they migrate with a host-country partner.

In Chapter Eight, Marlene Spanger examines migrant women sex workers along racial lines, looking at black sex workers in Denmark. 'Gender, race and nationality can be likened to mobility' (133). African migrant women who prostitute, usually without travel/citizenship documentation, exacerbate stereotyping from their clients, and often encounter workplace (and societal) mistreatment.

While interesting, the Migrant Women in Prostitution has already received a lot of attention. Works by Truong, Kempadoo, Dozema, Wijers and many significant others have explored women sex workers globally. Trafficking and white slavery laws have had extensively documented histories, and several conventions have been ratified on human trafficking - although with meagre effective action ensuing. The toothless tiger aspects of NGOs is another discussion. Compassion for some of the horrendous conditions evident in women and child migration of sex workers goes without saying. Lisborg aptly sums up Part Two when saying that there are 'few studies done about the *receiving* countries' (100), while numerous works analyse migrant women sex workers.

Critical Reflections

Chitraporn Vanaspong and Anders Lindstrom critique international prostitution with the unique overlays of religious, cultural and national perspectives. Their respective analyses of Thai and Moroccan sex workers, and the ways in which others perceive them, demonstrate pervasive, media-touted, and often inaccurate global views.

The over-reported phenomenon of the Thai sex industry is explored in Chapter Nine. Its prevalence has made travel for and the image of *non*-sex working women more hazardous and embarrassing. 'Thailand is known world-wide as the land of sex tourism' (139). This can lead to erroneous assumptions about all

Thai women. When sex is part of the national product, and global media devote a fierce attention onto Third World status, then the population, particularly women, fight an image problem unfairly hoisted upon them. When the 'international media keep on reinforcing the stereotyped image of Thailand as a sex paradise' (147), and the Thai government farcically denies the existence of the flesh trade, then Thai people, particularly women, are degraded by the hyperbole.

Chapter Ten details Anders Lindstrom's PhD research on Moroccan sex workers who migrate to work in Spain. Like the Buddhist culture in Thailand, the Muslim religion of Moroccan nationals plays a part in pride and secrecy issues that surround the already-stigmatised sex workers. Lindstrom found the disparity between reported numbers of Moroccan prostitutes in Spain arose from a blend of religion and national pride. A myth became a prevailing discourse; he concludes that this is another instance of 'how nations and ideologies use women for their own goals, and how women adapt these imposed images to suit their own interest' (167).

New Policies on Prostitution

Progressive policy on women who prostitute is variable internationally. In Part Four Noulmook Sitdhibbhaslip, Marieke van Doorninck and Arthur Gould address the book's subtitle of 'Changing global patterns'.

In Chapter Eleven, Noulmook Sitdhibbhaslip explores the punitive legal mores of Canada, and the often conflicting 'no-win' policies besetting migrant sex workers there. Her portrayals of (mainly Thai) migrant sex workers are unflattering. 'Rehabilitation' programmes have been thinly disguised pre-emptive legalese leading to gaol sentences, and high national deportation rates. This essay is well written and full of exemplary evidence of unjust practice.

Chapter Twelve explores the fully legal prostitution of The Netherlands, and as Marieke van Doorninck points out, Holland is often lauded as a progressive exemplar for the sex industry. Yet for all its political pragmatism in many social areas, sex workers here are not without their problems. A legally regulated sex industry in The Netherlands has still seen the flourishing of underground practices (unlicensed operators, illegal immigrants, corruption and a continuum of imperfect working conditions), and workers are imported from Eastern Europe and Asia.

Arthur Gould's chapter (13), is perhaps the most exciting and optimistic of the collection. Sweden's strong societal feminism, its history of consistently workable social welfare, and the 1998 Sexkopslag Law all contribute to progressive policy for prostitution. The 'strength of the women's movement' in Sweden, and a 50% representation of women in parliament is reflected in very humanist policy around sex work. Operating policy decrees that 'punters should be punished' (203) for exploitative or denigrating behaviour. Prostitution numbers in Sweden are among the lowest in the First World. In this collection of perspectives on transnational prostitution then, we have gone from bragging internet sex diarists, and concluded with an admirable instance of advanced (equitable, non-exploitative, progressive) sex industry policy, with implied possibilities for evolution elsewhere.

Conclusions

The book declares its aims in the Introduction. It acknowledges varied stances on global sex work, and states its purpose is a more humane and universally empathetic treatment of 'women who prostitute'. Pattanaik, who writes from a stated 'pro sex workers rights perspective' (202), states the 'true choice versus coercion' debates to be unhelpful, and in keeping with the wish to promote equity in

transnational sex work, promotes the pragmatism of workers' 'informed consent'.

While The Netherlands and Thailand routinely receive the lion's share of world media attention, less reported nations have their own policy and humanitarian issues around prostitution, with their own cultural nuances. Sex workers who migrate *within* Asia, from China, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, Malaysia, India, Pakistan, Myanmar and elsewhere still address class imbalances and political inequities. African sex workers face the human and labour rights abuses discussed in *Transnational Prostitution*, with their own colonised histories and race, class and gender overlays. A mélange of global sex workers is addressed in this work, but the editors note that the collection could be by no means exhaustive.

Samantha Shaw

The Ties that Bind: Life Turning Points, Interwoven in Community

Lesley Singh, *Cry Ma Ma to the Moon* Brisbane Interactive Press, 2002.

By Marian Redmond

Cry Ma Ma to the Moon centres on the Change looming in the life of Bess, a teacher with connections to the alternative community around Gatton and Helidon, a couple of hours drive from Brisbane. *Ma Ma* is the name of the local creek. It is about mummy and moon – the feminine and its place in the world, told in the first person through Bess's eyes. It refers to the biological, but not just the biological transformations in life. Just as in approaches to managing birth, one must respect the different choices women make, so it is with menopause. Such approaches are embedded in culture as well as being biological. When Lesley Singh writes about this important theme, one must recognize her particular way of dealing with the process and finding meaning in it and try to find the inner logic that propels her narrative. As a fable of the feminine, its writing charms, as the blurb on the back says, but does it work as a fable and what can it tell us about the Change?

Bess's anxiety at the onset of menopause occurs quite early, since this usually comes to women in their fifties, often at around 54 or 55, and she is only 42. Any need Bess may have to break out and experience sensuality is contained within a middle-aged cosiness. She feels the turmoil vicariously through her husband, Jim. She herself is comfortably into fires, chocolate and romance novels that keep her from the highs and lows of extramarital affairs. Jim is a curiously spectral figure through whom, helpfully, Bess's difficulties are enacted. Through his affair with Leila, the young poet and sensual dancer, problems with the Change are externalised. But this places the problem for the protagonist at one remove. Why should she not feel the disturbance herself, directly?

Singh deftly portrays the conflict in Bess's schoolmarm persona, so successful in the world of the small community, that brings in a good wage, and is predicated on being a good ma ma to the local children. She is confronted with the fact that her husband wants sensual fulfilment that she is not equipped to provide. The equation is seen in terms of the young and beautiful Leila, versus the less beautiful older woman, afraid of losing to the younger. Here we have what might be two aspects of a woman's persona, the sexy and the pragmatic split into two characters, unable to be reconciled.

Jim, it seems, is inherently attractive, what about Bess? What kind of a woman is she? No description is forthcoming, but with a name like MacPherson she might easily be of Irish extraction, having sandy hair, freckled skin and fat thighs. Jim hasn't worried about her fat thighs to this point, why does he change? Why does he so suddenly move from seeming contentment to a lack of interest. This is the manifestation of the Change, biological in its origins, but connected to a stage of life with intimations of mortality for both men and women. The problem is contained within the conventional terms of men actively expressing their anxiety at aging in a gregarious manner. Jim might well love both women. It is significant that he rejects Bess for Leila. Why should Bess not risk foolishness at the hands of her own

sensuality, experience her own delusion, wish to delay facing death?

The novel is set in an alternative community, who take an unorthodox approach to women's concerns. Whether it is really unorthodox remains to be seen. The young poet Leila, also a sensual dancer, wants a poetry group where one can say “fuck”. This announces a desire for freedom that contrasts with the conservative rural surroundings that Bess has had to accommodate to. To say that Singh's writing style is succinct and flows easily doesn't fully describe its felicity. It owes something to D.H. Lawrence's, but using a phrase like “O the loveliness of it”, seems anachronistic here. When the protagonist announces to her errant husband: “You think I can't imagine your passion? I can. Your pain? That too. You think it's been easy knowing all this and to keep knitting”, there is an unconscious humour that enlivens the novel all too rarely, manifesting itself also when the Leila's character is introduced and she tries to loosen up the rather conventional poetry group and its convenor, the bush poet, Alf. A stylistic similarity with Lawrence and the themes of the novel construct an instinctive trust in the certainties of the body and the landscape.

Leila supposes that the name *Ma Ma* derives from the Indigenous idiom mia mia, the word for a bush dwelling. So the problem of belonging in a community and recognising those who have gone before resides partially in the fact that the history of the area is not completely known. Leila articulates this when she asks herself questions, “What I'm doing here. Why I came.” The novel brings up some of the hidden contradictions in the settlement of the land, having been so recently taken from Indigenous people. This is what is interesting about the setting. but it remains obscure. The implication is that previous generations were brutes, wresting the land from Indigenous people. They tend to ascribe their children's wildness to having played with natives from New Guinea.

But what relationship do alternative locals have? They've bought it, or they live there. Their closeness to it is mediated by marijuana and their artisanship. There is a reference to Thoreau's *Walden*, through Jim the American, but this and the name of the farm, “Blueberry Hill”, don't quite fit the local community. Questions of belonging bedevil these – as they do many Australians – and provide the setting in which they must confront turning points in their lives.

The novel depicts the universe as an entity with which we are connected in our biological selves, and whose rhythms and necessity we must understand if we are to grow. It describes a sense of the interconnectedness of lives and destinies that drive us mysteriously, but, in my view, it is puritanical in its final assessment. Events conspire to support Bess in her stable relationship, although she must go through a trial of menstrual blood, where she smears dirt and blood on her face. She has an emotional catharsis to make way for new knowledge, that at an instinctive level, she already knows. In the words of the old wise woman, Clare, from whom she obtains her natural-dyed wools, she “weathers” the storm. Clare represents the healing powers of old women in the community, their understanding of weaving the skeins of belonging and mending them, and of the dignity of craftwork.

It is Leila who cries “ma ma” to the moon in her poem, who wants to know who she is, but Bess herself undergoes a journey of understanding through her trial of menstrual blood and spilling the blood of chickens. In this way, she moves to working with wool in a manner that will embody her power as an older woman and seer. Here, in spite of my avowed intention to take Singh on her own terms, I must depart, not only from her animal husbandry, but from the contradictory harshness that is signified by killing the old chooks, in the last pages of the novel.

Why does she do this? From the time of her trial of menstrual blood, Bess goes through a learning experience in which she becomes somewhat childish. Jim can teach her to see nature, and through this she can again experience good sex with him, the one who chops wood, and knows trees etc. Her own experience of gathering the materials of nature for her artisanship connects her with the land. At the same time she can laugh at men for thinking only through their cocks.

Her relationship with Jim revives in its connection with the rhythms and poetry of nature. Her artisanship with wool is achieved through a relationship with the land. But when she kills the old chooks, she curtails their lives to prevent them uselessly continuing to consume grain. Is it really the case, that we must painfully cut off our old selves in order to enter the new state of wisdom as older women? It's one way of doing it, but it's in contradiction with the harmony with nature described when Bess gathers eucalypts to dye her wools, and in her newly found concord with her husband. There is a puritanical element here: it seems that sensuality is the prerogative of men, merely an extravagance for women.

Towards the end, Singh's carefully crafted fable goes awry. The structure of the novel is marred by Leila's overlong letter that explains everything. Why is she given centre stage at this point in the novel? Although Singh tries to respect and integrate Leila into the community of the novel, it's plain that she is simply too appalling to admit. Being burdened with a father who is an outsider, and who has done appalling things, she must resort to a spiritual path, and forgo her sensuality.

Leila is massively pathologised because, she may otherwise decentre the heroine from her pedestal. The novel moves towards didacticism when the protagonist needs to be “better” (for this read less disturbed) than her man's lover? Leila, despite her obvious attractiveness, is a bad seed, having “wild, glittering eyes”. Having been abused by her Lebanese father, she is caught in a dilemma, but why was it necessary for her character to have been so massively burdened to ensure that her relationship with Jim will never proceed? She might just as easily have faded quietly out of the picture. The reason is that she is quasi-integrated into the community, but in a way that will never again threaten the domestic harmony of the protagonist. What is more, like a good, docile woman, she bears the new of her willing redemption to her erstwhile lover and his wife.

Her father was Lebanese, but with the preponderance of McLeods and MacPhersons, I fail to see why he couldn't have been a common or garden Irish brute. This is more “othering” or splitting that builds on Bess's and Leila's splitting of pragmatic and sensual concerns. It increases the awareness of those who are outsiders in the community, which in turn rests on the construction of common interests or origins that binds it.

In these representations we have, not the beauty and rhythms of nature, but harshness, too much responsibility, economic imperatives and being allowed to be in your body no more than conditionally (where one is usefully serving the sensuality that is actively represented by men). Only men are allowed that luxury and are doomed to have contempt for themselves. In this case, it is a story of the woman being left to support the family, take the tough decisions, kill the chooks, while her husband plays sensual games. Jim is bloodless, the plaything of Bess, who through the medium of her knitting, wills him to serve her interests, backed up by the somewhat Machiavellian, but idealised figure of Clare.

The work of the land through artisanship, including the dying and knitting, contains a genuine value. Artisanship can lead to the weaving of webs of belonging, and visions of community, but here, it lacks the depth of a strong identity and history
Bess's body is not fully allowed to be itself. it is not loved, not permitted to experience itself. at the appropriate level. Like the chooks, her sensuality, is suspended in the interests of economic production.

Mortality is the obvious counterpoint to sensuality. The body, that menstruates, loves sexually, gives birth and undergoes menopause must suffer a process of gradual disengagement from sexual attraction and ultimately from life. This process is one that many of us have to grapple with. Although I am critical of the depiction of relationships, we don't live in a utopia and the representations of such relationships in their local setting is valuable. *Cry Ma Ma to the Moon* is not just a charming fable about sensuality, but raises resonant questions about the turning points in our lives, and the way they are interwoven with community.