Australian Women's Book Review

Volume 17.1 (2005)

"Last Night Blues" by Pat Larter

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ISSN: 1033 9434

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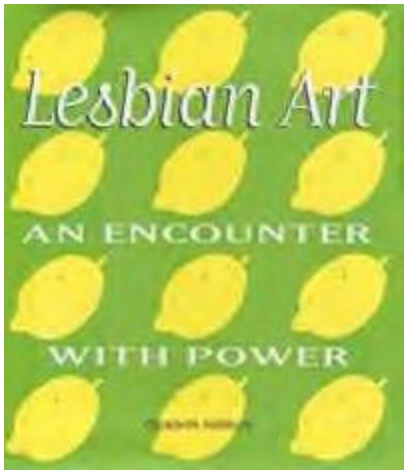
Lesbian Art and Feminism: A Review Essay.

By Liz Ashburn

For many years lesbian art remained an invisible area within the fine arts. Since lesbian artists may produce work that is based on issues other than their sexuality, when I refer to lesbian art I mean art that is created by lesbians to explore facets of lesbian experience or issues relevant to lesbian existence.

I discuss here the past invisibility of lesbian art and its recent recognition, and argue for the continued alignment of lesbian art with feminist critiques. I stress the importance of lesbians being in control of their representation rather than as the object of representation by others.

The Past Invisibility of Lesbian Art



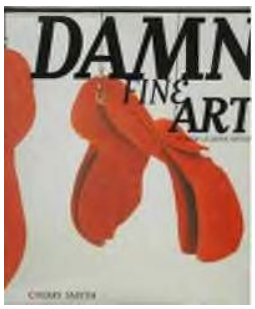
Lesbian art was visible for a brief period during the 1920s and 30s. The work of lesbian artists such as Romaine Brooks and Hannah Gluck and of bisexual artists such as Tamara de Lempicka was exhibited in Europe. Outside this time, lesbian art has not been readily available in galleries or in reproductions. The art of male homosexual artists has always been exhibited within mainstream exhibitions and galleries. But the twin mechanisms of misogyny and homophobia resulted in censorship and discrimination against lesbian artists and their art.

Images of lesbians depicted by male artists were available in mainstream art, for example in the paintings of Gustave Courbet, but such images present lesbians as objects, rather than allowing the lesbian to interpret her own sexuality.

Some lesbian artists have worked from a theoretical position based on the libertarian principle that individuals have freedom to express their sexuality in an infinite number of ways, and these images have included bondage and other similar practices. However many others created from a basis generated through feminist thought. Some were influenced by the spiritual and essentialist forms of feminism and incorporated images based on the goddess legends, while other lesbian artists drew on feminist critiques of patriarchy, post-colonialism and the process of commodification.

In the brief space of four years in the 1990s, there were three books published that dealt exclusively with lesbian art and together provided an international survey of some of the previously hidden work of these artists. Importantly these books on lesbian art widely circulated their images; and gave these artists the status of subjects in control of their own representation.

Lesbian Art : A Brief Period of Fame



In 1996 I wrote *Lesbian Art: An Encounter with Power*, which examined lesbian art in Australia. Later the same year Cheryl Smyth produced *Damn Fine Art* which considered lesbian art internationally but mainly dealt with work produced in the United Kingdom. In 2000 Harmony Hammond wrote *Lesbian Art in America: A Contemporary History*. All three were formatted as handsome coffee table books

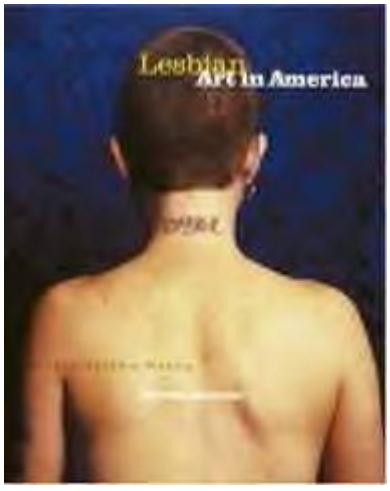
with many large colour and black and white plates, artists' statements, and a text which gave a history of lesbian art and contextualised the work of each artist. Each volume was published through an established publishing house so that the fact of their publication was remarkable considering the previous neglect of this area. These books celebrated many dedicated artists whose lesbian art was often exhibited outside mainstream galleries, and thus marked a significant point in the public recognition of lesbian art.

However, their publication still had difficulties. The depiction of the many aspects of lesbian sexuality is more immediate and explicit when expressed in images than when described in literature. Some of the images in these books explored female sexuality in ways that continue to be controversial, confronting or considered pornographic. Before my book was printed my editor approached me, as she was concerned that the printers in Singapore would find some of the images I wanted to include offensive. When I pointed out that almost one third of the plates would need to be deleted, the book was not censored and was finally printed in China.

These three books celebrate the peak of support for lesbian art and indicate their brief period of fame. From this time there was generally a drop in the number of lesbian art exhibitions and less opportunity for the lesbian artist to show her work. There were several reasons for this. The conservative backlash against the pluralism of the 70s and 80s resulted in a shift away from identity politics (Hammond, p182) and the nature of queer theory impacted on the situation of lesbians.

These two developments were also of concern to many feminists who are opposed to neo-conservatism in its attack on progressive women's organizations and its anti-abortion stance. The concern of other feminists comes from their criticism of postmodern theory, including queer theory, and its failure to provide ways to oppose conservatism.

The Backlash Against Lesbian Artists



In America the conservative backlash against art that considered difference and sexuality was particularly vicious as the National Endowment for the Arts was attacked in the 1990s for funding gay artists and their work (Hammond, p182). The situation in Australia was not so immediate. The electoral dominance of a reformist Labor party during the 1980s had encouraged the emergence of a multicultural national identity and produced a rhetoric of tolerance across Australia. This also resulted in legislation to prevent discrimination towards homosexuals and racial and homosexual vilification.

However, successive Howard governments have eroded support for homosexuals. The conservative Liberal party in Australia actively promotes an anti-lesbian stance and a conservative backlash has encouraged hatred, intolerance and suspicion directed towards lesbians. Before this recent election, and following the lead of George Bush, the Liberal Party called for a ban on gay marriage and was supported in this policy by the Labor opposition. The Prime Minister of Australia has argued that lesbians are unsuitable mothers and should be denied access to IVF. There was uproar when two lesbian parents were shown with their child on the Australian Broadcasting Commission TV channel in the pre-school program *Playschool*.

The earlier legislation designed to prevent the vilification of homosexuals is currently contested in several high profile prosecutions of talkback radio commentators who have made certain comments about homosexuals. The basis of their argument appears to be that such derogatory comments should be allowed as part of their right of freedom of speech.

In a climate of neo-conservatism there has been an increase in religious-based intolerance. Prior to the last election, a volunteer worker for the Family First Party claimed that lesbians should be burned at the stake. Lesbians are again considered a great threat to the straight family and to the stability of society through their culture and their very existence.

As a consequence there has been a reduction of funding and curatorial opportunities for lesbian artists in Australia and overseas.

The development of queer theory was another factor that contributed to the loss of support for lesbian art. Queer theory introduced the concept of a sexuality that was not fixed and that offered, as Max Kirsch suggested, 'as many possibilities for gender as there are those filling them' (p49). Kirsch points out that because queer theory also confuses personal action with structural power, it asserts 'the primacy of the first or individual aspect, while ignoring its determinants.' Resistance to structural power requires collective action (Kirsch, p42).

Queer theory aims to build existing 'social spaces that encourage the proliferation of pleasures, desires, voices, interests, modes of individuation and democratisation,' as Steven Seidman suggests (p106). However through queer theory's celebration of difference and its claiming the refusal to identify as a radical act, its assertions are supportive of the same ideal of the individual-as-self created by Capitalism (Kirsch, p43). This inclusive nature of queer, its anti-essentialist intent and fluid boundaries, undermined its own position of difference so that queer lost its oppositional status (Hammond, p182).

Finally, when the works of so-called 'queer' artists who identified as straight were included in queer exhibitions and projects, queer identity was 'absorbed into the liberal heterosexual project' and demonstrated what Michael Warner called the 'totalising tendency of heteronormativity' (Warner, pxxi-xxv). Queer cheerfully embraced everything, but the individual today is encouraged to separate themselves from the pack so the new inclusive sexuality fell out of fashion, leaving heterosexuality as the consistent paradigm (Warner p184).

In order for queer to be something more than a novel digression of difference they cannot fight alone. Nor can lesbians, who are critical of queer, counter the increasing power of neo-conservatism and the growing influence of those who are part of the religious fundamentalism of the right.

Future Strategies

Hammond suggests that for now, and for the future, there are several strategies available to lesbian artists. Post queer does not mean post feminist (p184). All these strategies can be strengthened through an alignment with feminism.

First, lesbian artists need to maintain their position as subjects in control of the representation of their own sexuality. When lesbians are not in control of creating the representation of their lives and the issues that are of concern to them they remain objects rather than subjects. Lesbians are objectified when heterosexuals are offered lesbian sexuality as mainstream spectacle such as the TV series *The L*

Word. This is not to say there is no value in having women depicted as loving other women, but the use by heterosexuals of images of women having sex as an aid to heterosexual sex leaves lesbians as object.

Artists need to find venues willing to show lesbian artwork. In Sydney the New Mardi Gras has risen from the ashes and, although reduced in its capacity to support visual artists, still provides opportunities to show lesbian art. Lesbian artists do need to maintain a lesbian presence outside the gay and lesbian community. Lesbian artists need to contribute to mainstream, alternative feminist and ethnic-based projects. There are many audiences who remain supportive of lesbians and their work, and it is important to affirm our connections with other groups.

Lesbian artists need to contest the stereotypes offered in mainstream representations of lesbians. There are many different lesbian lives that need to be expressed in all their various aspects. Lesbian artists need to present this complexity as clearly as they are able (Hammond p183).

But most importantly, as Hammond points out, the project for lesbian art in the future must continue to create lesbian cultural expression as it has 'the potential to not only empower lesbians, gays and women, but also by critiquing the politics, language, and culture of patriarchy, to play a major role in the empowering of many marginalised peoples' (p185).

Although this particular 15 minutes of fame for lesbian art has now passed, we need to persist in demanding visibility. Lesbian artists must not be silent or allow others to tell them what kind of art lesbians may or may not make, nor let the creative work of lesbians 'be ignored, or 'straightened', dehistoricised, discontextualised, or erased' (p185).

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Liz Ashburn was Co-President for the Australian Centre for Gay and Lesbian Research at the University of Sydney for nine years, and is an Emeritus Professor at UNSW and an Adjunct Professor at the University of Newcastle. This was a talk at the 'Australian and International Feminisms Conference' in Sydney, 12-14 December 2004.

Rethinking the Family: Change, Continuity and 'Choice': A Review Essay

Leslie Cannold. *What, No Baby? Why Women Are Losing the Freedom To Mother, and How They Can Get It Back*, Fremantle, Curtin University Press, 2005;
Marg Vandeleur. *The Catch*, Camberwell, Victoria, Penguin Books, 2005;
Marilyn Poole, ed. *Family: Changing Families, Changing Times*, Crow's Nest, Allen & Unwin, 2005;
Sarah Cunningham-Burley and Lynn Jamieson, eds. *Families and the State: Changing Relationships*, Basingstoke, Hampshire and New York, Palgrave McMillan, 2003.

By Jane Maree Maher

> Family and personal relationships are crucial to the quality of life and health of individuals and the economic and social well-being of society. (Jamieson and Burley-Cunningham 2)

Australia's recent domestic history has showed that definitions of family and expectations about families are no longer straightforward. From debates about family-friendly policies, through exhortations for women to have bigger families to the fate of families like the Bakhtiari family who were ultimately expelled from Australia on the basis of their uncertain 'origin', questions of what constitutes 'family' and who is responsible for supporting such social units have dogged Australian governments and policy makers. Jane Lewis argues that this is also true of the United Kingdom, where 'the family became a major political issue … during the 1990s as policy makers began to recognize the rapid pace of family change' (Cunningham-Burley and Jamieson 69). The media too have been involved in sustained discussions about work/life balance, equal access to IVF and men's and women's family work and responsibilities. It is appropriate then to consider how this diverse group of texts, all of which have ideas of family as a central focus, examine, explicate and describe family and the current social, political and theoretical issues that drive family formation and influence family experience in the twenty-first century. The intersections of the personal domains of love, intimacy and emotion with the public domains of policy, social support and the polis provide the central fault line along which these texts cohere.

Three of these texts are Australian: Leslie Cannold's *What, No Baby?* outlines her thesis that the definition of 'voluntary childlessness' needs to be more thoroughly investigated to encompass the diversity of women's experiences and to show what responsibility for women's 'choices' falls to government and workplace inflexibility; Marilyn Poole's *Family* gathers prominent sociologists and offers a comprehensive teaching text for the key issues that affect families, family formation and the life course; Marg Vandeleur's novel *The Catch* details Letty's thirty-something search for a baby in the absence of a committed partner. The fourth, Cunningham-Burley and Jamieson's *Families and the State*, offers a useful and thoughtful account from the United Kingdom of the ways in which policy directions respond to and affect diverse families. In this collection, Janet Finch outlines a divide between what social science can tell about the 'wide variation in the form which family relationships take' and the tendency of governments to 'reach for more uniformity' (31) in policy and approach. This tension undergirds each of these texts, where new models of family intersect and sometimes collide with existing social and political expectations about what families are.

Leslie Cannold's *What, No Baby?* is a polemical exegesis of what Cannold suggests are important nuances that are not apparent in the current accounts of fertility decline. Cannold energetically contests

contemporary accounts of the ways in which women that are childless make that 'choice'. While the language of choice has always been a problematic one for feminist thinking, Cannold goes one step further to suggest that current formulations of women with children and women without them fail to account for what she describes as the 'circumstantially childless' (15). For Cannold, 'circumstantial childlessness'

> is a consequence of the lack of real options experienced by contemporary women who want to have children. This lack of options begins with the way our society defines 'good' mothers and implicitly questions the rationality of those who procreate. It then moves on to the lack of men who are willing and able to play the husband and father part in the procreative drama, and is sadly rounded off by the Byzantine constraints the contemporary workplace imposes on employees who dare to dream of a life beyond the office. (23)

Cannold rightly points out that studies repeatedly show young women want children and more of them than they are currently having but suggests that once women hit their thirties, there is often a re-evaluation that limits the number of children that women actually have or causes women without children to decide that they cannot have any.

What, No Baby? focuses on women's fertility decisions through the lens of workplace issues and contemporary employment patterns and conditions. As Barbara Pocock (2003) and Ann Summers (2003) among others have pointed out, current Australian workplace conditions are crucially reducing the quality of work and the possibility of accessing a good life/work balance for all Australians, not just those with young children. This is one of the key calls that Cannold makes in *What, No Baby?* arguing that workplaces have not responded to the needs of women, men and families. But Cannold also centrally contests the on-going persistence of the '(frustratingly enduring) myth of the "good" mother' (132). Arguing that mothers are simultaneously idealised and derided for the irrational choice of mothering, Cannold expresses great frustration at how resistant the discourses about motherhood have been to change. Barbara Pocock similarly reflected, in her ground-breaking *The Work/Life Collision* in 2003, on the 'unrenovated models of mothering' (1) that shape social and economic institutions in Australia, and *What, No Baby?* sits in this developing tradition of gender and labour force analyses in Australia. Cannold also addresses this book to American women, drawing on qualitative research conducted in the United States about women's decisions for and against mothering as well as media representations from the American press, but much of the research and many of the key commentators Cannold uses are Australian.

Cannold's call to re-examine the conventional categorizations of women without children as 'voluntarily childless' is an important one, for such conventional categorizations, couched as stereotypes, often serve to occlude important social and economic aspects of reproductive decision-making. Paying attention to the different pathways by which women and men come to be living with or without children is important for accurate sociological accounts of new families and for appropriate policy making. Cannold's definition of the 'circumstantially childless' offers an account of the often ambivalent and uncertain 'choices' that women make, and draws attention to the way in which such

choices are encouraged and sometimes enforced. She goes further in her drive to account for these different pathways and identifies 'circumstantially childless' women as falling into two distinct groups: 'thwarted mothers' and 'waiters and watchers'. The continuing commitment of the first group to motherhood is matched by the hesitancy and ambivalence of the latter group. For Cannold, the 'waiters and watchers' are those most impacted upon by what they see around them:

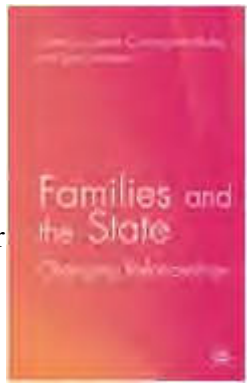
> it is these women who pay the greatest amount of attention to parenting realities on the ground and make and change their personal decisions about motherhood accordingly. (93)

For these women, workplace conditions and negative social values assigned to motherhood will, in Cannold's view, cause them to move away from potential motherhood.

While Cannold's focus is primarily on women in *What, No Baby?*, she does also say:

> men have had the rung of long-standing definitions of masculinity pulled out from beneath them: how do you think they feel? (209)

The outlines and content of public debates about family-friendly policy and fertility, Cannold suggests, do not address or include men and therefore they can feel left out of the decisions and excluded from the public debates. The delay in partnering and changes in the social value attributed to parenthood impact on men as well as women, as other research has suggested (Birrell et al, 2004). While Cannold does examine how slow men are to change, factors she suggests that women 'waiters and watchers' are taking into account, she identifies 'gorgeous men' who do want to parent and work in some reasonable balance and suggests we seek them out. Seeing men as 'essential political allies' (237) in the struggle for new reproductive and parenting opportunities however, is often difficult given the amount of work on domestic labour in Australia suggesting that men are, by and large, reluctant to take up the opportunities and challenges of hands-on parenting and paid work together (Bittman, 2004).



Cannold's book is at once an endeavor to reshape public debates about families and a challenge to commentators, workplaces and other institutions to undertake a serious re-evaluation of how parenthood is regarded and practiced. She is critical of those such as Catherine Hakim who assume that contemporary work patterns for women are a reflection of their choice (2003). Focusing on an article by journalist Lisa Belkin published in the United States in 2003 in the *New York Times*, Cannold suggests that the main problem is how Belkin understands the stories women tell her about their withdrawal into more traditional mothering roles. Belkin suggests, according to Cannold that these women are retreating from corporate life, making a choice for more contact with their children; Cannold notes the substantive workplace difficulties these women faced and critiques Belkin's account: 'she assumes that what women do is what they choose to do. Not only is such a presumption illogical: it has little in the way of evidence to back it up' (255). She draws on work by Peter McDonald to suggest that fertility rates across the developed world reflect the reality that when part-time and flexible work is available, women continue to have children in larger numbers (McDonald, 1998)

Cannold urges a rethinking of motherhood and parenting as they are experienced in intimate relationships and by individual social actors. In the book's Coda, she writes:

> For me, the most heart-rending observation of the many circumstantially childless women I

> interviewed was that they'd be fools to have children. How could it make sense to have children when the choice (and its outcome) would consciously and deliberately undermine every value they held dear? (312)

In suggesting that motherhood is valuable and not necessarily irrational, Cannold wants to 'enable us to speak highly of the impulse to care' (318). She challenges Anthony Giddens' account of the intimacy cost of children in a couple relationship, arguing that children 'both [*modify*] existing relationships and [provide] new relationship satisfactions' (120). She urges rethinking of the 'imprisoning tentacles of the good motherhood myth' (163), arguing that women want to be able to enjoy motherhood without engaging in myths of self-sacrifice. Cannold's book is part research monograph, part popular text and it does serve to illustrate the poverty of discussion around family and reproduction in contemporary Australia. Calling on scholars, policy makers and commentators to take account seriously of the stories some women tell about why they don't have children represents an important move away from polarized visions of mothers and non-mothers as two different species of women.

What, No Baby? is critical about the ways feminism has been blamed for falling birthrates and various other material ills. But Cannold does suggest that:

> feminists should step back from the work/family issue, and hand it over to an (as yet nonexistent) organization that is better equipped to continue the fight: a parents' movement. (305)

Cannold envisages that such a movement would 'build coalitions' with existing interest groups in the work/family or work/life battlefield in order to pursue better workplace outcomes for all. But given what she has argued about 'good' mother myths and women's employment patterns, women's interests in this particular social conflict are likely to be higher and more urgent than those of governments, employers and fathers. Giving women genuine 'choices' has never been a high priority for these groups. As Barbara Pocock argues in *Family*:

> many things around carers remain steadily unchanging, most notably the domestic workload that falls to them, and the institutions of the workplace and care around which they must juggle their changing paid work and care responsibilities (114).

Marg Vandeleur's *The Catch* is set in Melbourne and its central character, Letty, is one of those 'circumstantially childless' women Leslie Cannold wants accounted for in new ways in public and policy discourse. For Letty, the break up of her long-term relationship, being at an age approaching forty and a full-on birth experience she witnesses, drive her to seek out a baby independent of seeking out a man; for her, there isn't enough time for the two together. Through the contacts sourced by her friend Jules, a lesbian who does know likely men who want to be fathers – many of them gay, Letty sets out to interview prospective fathers. Jules and Letty identify Robert, just out of his long-term relationship, a talented knitter and a real 'softy' as the best candidate and begin inseminations. Jules attends these evenings with Letty as a kind of guardian. On the way through this process, or on the way to Weight Watchers to be more specific, Letty meets and falls pregnant to Hayden, who by the end of the novel, is standing in as both husband and father. Jules, taken by the despair and nurturing capacity of Robert, is in a new relationship herself and successfully carrying a baby conceived with Robert. The novel ends with Letty's speculation on whether there is more match-making to be done, so that Robert too can be father and partner.

The Catch does mount a critique of conventional heterosexual relationships, marriage and the bonds of nuclear families and it does offer an engaging portrait of the 'family' life and love that is possible with some imagination. Letty is a theatrical agent and can spot emerging trends and new talent; she proves, in the end, adept at this in life as well as in art. Vandeleur's novel is a hopeful account of new social connections, but the lives of her protagonists are not plagued by the troubles Cannold identifies for women wanting to parent; work is flexible, money is not a concern and broader policy queries about new family structures don't beset these women and men. The 'Melbourne' that is painted in *The Catch* is one of late night venues, artistic freedom, and relative autonomy from the structural constraints that the contributors to Marilyn Poole's *Family* point out as key inhibitors to the support of new or, even, more traditional family structures.

Poole's *Family* is primarily designed as a textbook, with each chapter containing an outline of a key area of debate about 'families'. It aims to generate an understanding of 'family' as a theoretical concept, social reality, area of study and site of tension, and then offers key questions and further resources for research. The topics covered include fertility decisions and mothering and fathering as well as addressing current understandings of violence (Poole) and the impact of ageing on family structures (Feldman and Seedsman). Poole's *Family* cites and supports the proposition outlined by Elizabeth Gernsheim-Beck that changes to traditional families do not signal a new and more individualistic family form. Instead, Poole suggests that Gernsheim-Beck is arguing for a new conceptualization of the 'post-familial family' (5). Much of *Family* describes the development and formation of these new family forms, with Andrew Singleton charting the emergence of the 'new father' beyond the breadwinner and Sherry Saggers and Margaret Sims looking at family forms beyond the nuclear.

Poole's is a conversational and useful textbook, simultaneously acknowledging students' needs and irritations, an example: 'sometimes theories are contradictory. This can be annoying to readers who are looking for a correct answer or explanation' (22), and offering clear and concise accounts of key debates and social trends. Poole's contribution focusing on existing and emerging 'theories of the family' includes an historical analysis that cites Mary Wollstonecraft and moves forward from there. Singleton's discussion of the notion that 'contemporary men [are] more committed to connecting with their children than men in previous generations' (135) brings forward evidence for and against the proposition, concluding that currently 'women … continue to take the leading role in the provision and organization of practical child-care' (2005: 148). Kerreen Reiger provides an account of the shifting shape of the Australian family, noting that 'it is not easy to separate out economic factors affecting families and households from ideological and personal ones' (57). This point is further developed in the contributions by Barbara Pocock and Helen Marshall analyzing women's paid and unpaid work and the declining fertility rate in Australia respectively. These two essays explore the way new economic conditions and expectations impact on families, both in their formation and in their day-to-day operations. Both scholars offer clear and useful accounts of key research and critical debates in these 'family' topics that have been so prominent on the national stage. When Peter Costello urged women to have 'one for the nation', (*Adelaide Review*) he crystallized some of the questions about women's roles and fertility that have undergirded recent policy developments (the Baby Bonus; Family Tax Benefit part B) and recent policy failures (HREOC 2002a, 2002b). *Family* offers a valuable and concrete resource to assist students to explore the changes they will have experienced in contemporary family life.

While Sarah Cunningham-Burley and Lynn Jamieson's *Families and the State* has its genesis in the UK and many of the articles focus on research work from there, it does contain work by Australian scholars

and offers a useful lens through which to examine the questions of family life raised in the three Australian texts already discussed. *Families and the State* takes as its central question 'whether [the] attempt to discriminate between and steer towards particular forms of family or personal life does harm or good' (2). Each of the contributions to the volume analyses specific incidents of state response to changing families in terms of what the State is able to achieve and what it cannot, considering, for example, the particular needs of lone parents (Clarke), black families (Prevatt Goldstein) and those experiencing some form of disability (Shakespeare and Watson). John J. Rodger argues that 'the British Welfare state has used a variety of mechanisms to shape behaviour. The two main ways of doing this have been through the direct provision of state funded services and the fiscal device known as tax expenditures (child tax allowances, mortgage interest relief, life assurance relief and pension scheme relief) (51). These approaches to shaping the family have prevailed in Australia too. Janet Finch focuses on how new marriage and divorce laws have interacted with the specific kinship structures in the British Isles. She argues that the 'highly variable character [of] family life in these islands is not simply a product of 'the global pressures associated with late modernity' (33), since historical analyses will reveal that family forms and state responses have always been intertwined and ever changing. While Finch suggests that the particular issues of inheritance she is discussing can be clearly demonstrated in England, because of the idiosyncratic nature of English kinship structures, her broader point is applicable across *Families and the State* where contemporary conditions are generally understood to have *changed the ways families change* rather than inaugurated new forms of change in previously stable social units. This historical location of family change, something Kerreen Reiger argues occurs in the Australian context as well in *Family*, is an important moment for revealing the political landscape in which definitions of family and the provision of state support are formed. As such, these specific case studies offer useful models for analysis and application in the Australian context, even when the focus is specifically on British policies and impacts. The on-going dialogue about the role of the state in regulating personal life and a focus on how 'the conduct of personal life across the life course has changed significantly … in the wealthy nations of Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand' (3) initiated by Cunningham-Burley and Jamieson is an important one.

Each of these texts contributes to a fuller and livelier account of 'family' at a time when families of all sorts are under pressure from diminishing social and fiscal support and changing social norms. Each insists on the intersection of economic, political, historical and individual factors in defining ideas of family and impacting on families' economic and social well-being in contemporary Western societies. Although disparate in form and intent, the three Australian texts offer a valuable lens to view the public debates, media discourses and policy landscape in contemporary Australia. Since each of these texts also argues effectively that the desire to form co-operative living groups is as strong as it has ever been, it is unlikely that the ideas generated here will lose currency in the foreseeable future.

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The Black History

By Ruby Langford Ginibi

Ever since I finished my first book, *Don't Take Your Love To Town*, in 1988, 1 have had many invitations to lecture on Aboriginal culture, history, and politics. It is a great opportunity for me to educate people about Kooris. Our history and culture was rarely acknowledged, or taught in the Australian school curriculum. So I'd like to set the record straight.

There are approximately a hundred Aboriginal books written and sold each year, yet 80 percent of the writing funded is written by non-Aboriginals. How these writings perceive Aboriginals is the thing that perpetuates racism and stereotyping, and marginalises us even more. I often ask myself, if the role was reversed would white Australians let us Kooris write their history? No fear! We are sick of being represented by people who have little experience of, or no formal education with Aboriginal people. Once again, we are misrepresented by misinformed people. This keeps us on the lowest ladder of the social order in Australia. We should be the ones to define ourselves, and teach our culture, and we have many Aboriginal people who could do this.

Long before the colonists came and settled, our people had family clans, all one people, but different tribes; we shared everything. Our tribal laws were formed on the basis of 'caring and sharing', there were no kings or queens, that was only the whiteman's concept. We had a democratic society before the invasion by these settlers. We had tribal elders, who gave us our laws to live by. Aboriginal laws were the first laws of this land. To break those laws meant banishment from the tribe or, worse still, you got speared.

Men and women had their places in our society. The men were the hunters, but the women were food gathers too. They had tribal areas and moved around freely, asking permission if another tribe's boundaries were to be crossed. If the food chain was getting scarce, they back-burned the land, giving it time to regenerate, then the grass would grow back and the animals returned. This was how they kept the food chain going.

In 1883 the Governments formed the Protection Act. They didn't want my people wandering around like they'd done for centuries before white man came. They rounded my people up like cattle, and herded them on to missions and reserves, which were mostly out of towns, near rubbish dumps. Out of sight, out of mind really.

There were monthly rations, which consisted of flour, tea, sugar, and golden syrup ('Cockies Joy' we called it). The rations weren't to be had if you were able bodied, you had to work 'bloody hard' for them.

These missions were like Nazi prison camps with white camp commandants running them. 1 know what they were like – I was born on one, you see. You had to get permission to go and look for work, or even to come and go. If any of your relatives wanted to come to visit, they were specified a time, and if they didn't leave then the police were sent to run them off.

The overall thing was to change us to their ways, to conform, to deny our cultural heritages and assimilate. Then they set about breaking up our family clans, by forcibly removing the half-caste children to hide the fact that they were fathered by white men. That was how we got our degrees of

caste to begin with. They also thought that letting these children grow up tribally was aberrant, because our traditional people were classified as heathens and vermin, to be cleared of the face of the earth.

The children were placed in training homes like Cootamundra and Bomaderry, and Kinchela boys home, to be trained in servitude to white people. There are only records of eight thousand of these children, but later research has placed it as twenty thousand in New South Wales alone. And they were taking the children in every state in Australia. We call them the stolen generation. Children were taken from as far back as 1883, when troopers rode up on horse-back and rounded them up, right up to 1969, the year they landed men on the moon.

In New South Wales, there are one hundred thousand people with some degree of Aboriginal blood in them, but a large number are never identified as Aboriginal because they thought their children would be taken also.

These missions and reserves were handed down to us since the days of Queen Victoria, but the Aborigine's Protection Board illegally leased great sections to soldier settlers to and migrants so they could progress. Nothing was done to let us do the same, we got no protection only exploitation, and it's the same still today.

In the 1900s the missionaries were brought in, they were given the job of civilising us savages. They didn't know that ours was a very spiritual culture, and that we always knew there was good spirit who looked after every living thing and that we lived in unity with the earth (our mother) and had always done so – not destroying things, and only killing for food. The colonists however, fenced off great pieces of land, and sheep and cattle were introduced. Our people had no access to our traditional foods; if we took sheep or cattle because of hunger, our people were shot.

Three hundred Aboriginal nations died through the colonisation and invasion of our lands. The so called 'colonising of Australia' was not a peaceful process. Aboriginal spears were no match for muskets. Australia before settlement supported a population of about three to four hundred thousand hunter gatherer tribespeople; later research has placed the population as nearing the million mark. There were five hundred tribes and about three thousand different dialects: now, there are less than two hundred tribes and twenty languages. We have been divided and quartered and split apart, torn asunder by the dominant culture in this country.

We weren't counted in the census until 1967, and given the right to vote and seen as be real human beings. There was a Referendum held that gave us the right to vote in 1967. It also gave the Commonwealth the right to make laws, giving the then Aboriginal Protection Board, the power of controlling all Aboriginal people's movements, and their rights to education, employment, and economic independence.

We have no recognition or acknowledgment for any input into the settling of this land. But, our people were the first pioneers, they were stock-men and women, housemaids, servants, and midwives. The first squatters would never have been able to survive without Aboriginal help! Then you have people saying: 'I don't know why Aborigines are crying about land rights, they never fought for this country.' They did fight for this country, but never received any acknowledgment for it. They had the discriminating powers of Federation, which stated that a full-blooded Aboriginal need not enlist, but those with an admixture of European blood could – but still our people were recruiting as far back as

the Boer war.

In 1940, Aboriginal people who broke away from the Protection Act were issued with a 'citizen's right', if they could prove they were able to work and be independent. We called it a 'dog licence'. Our men were good enough to enlist in the forces, but they could not breast the bar for a beer with their white mates without it and it could be revoked at any time for minor things. You were not allowed to associate with your own immediate family, or any other Aboriginals; it was the 'divide and rule' mentality. We were not allowed into mainstream public schools until the early forties and fifties because of racism. Segregated picture shows, blacks on one side whites on the other, segregated hospitals, a special ward down the back with 'Aborigines only' written on it.

We are the most jailed people in Australia yet we make up not quite 2% of the total population of 18 million, now 20 million. We cannot be the most bad, evil people in this now multicultural nation. In 1987, a Royal Commission into Aboriginal deaths in custody was conducted. Ninety-nine Aboriginal deaths were reviewed and 339 recommendations were made. From 1989 to 1996, there have been another 92 Aboriginal deaths and not one of those recommendations has been implemented. The incarceration rate is getting higher and higher. There is also a 50% incarceration of our youth, the statistics are disgusting the cycle of incarceration of our men, women and juveniles, is one of the biggest shames of this country! They cannot jail us forever, though it seems like they already have.

The people who colonised this country, were not the cream of the British aristocracy, but the dregs of an oppressed society, who brought that oppression here and oppressed our Aboriginal people with it. They were the builders of jails and prisons, and in 217 years the mentality hasn't changed. Though one change is that the oppressors are on top and are the bosses, my people are still the most marginalised and oppressed.

We have always been a political football in this country. Aboriginal images have been used for tourism, for 'big bucks', yet you won't see any of our black faces on the commercial channels, only on SBS or ABC They use exotic blacks like American Negroes or Jamaicans, they are acceptable, but our own indigenous ones are not.

We do not have a voice. We had ATSIC in Canberra, made up of Aboriginal people from every state in Australia, but even our chairperson was answerable to the 'white minister', and that's not self determination! That's still governmental control, which they have always had of Aboriginal people in Australia.

The Maori people have been sharing parliament with the pakeha for over a hundred years, but where are our seats in Parliament for our Indigenous representatives? We don't have any, we still have white man running our race for us, like we don't have a brain to think with.

Now we have a multicultural society, we have people of many different nationalities migrating here. They don't give away their languages, or culture to become Australian citizens, but we Koori people were forced to assimilate and become like white people, we never had a choice!

Today Aboriginal people are fifteen to twenty years behind every one in all the basic human rights needs, such as health, housing, education, and employment, we have never been consulted about any of the issues that affect our daily lives. We have all those so called 'experts' who know all about us Kooris,

when the whole of Australia knows nothing about us because of our well-hidden history. There has however been a revolution in Aboriginal writing over the last twenty years. Many Aboriginal women writers are writing, as well as men.

And we are all saying the same things, we are telling the people of this land our stories, which are our histories. We have always had to be the ones to conform to the white man's ways, learn the Queen's English, so we can educate white Australia about our history, because nothing has ever been taught about us. Most big book shops, do not promote Aboriginal writing, only the well known ones. Black Books was our only well-known one, now it's no more.

Now a new Government has come into power. We Kooris did make some headway with the Labour government. Paul Keating pushed for Reconciliation, and the 'Mabo' legislation, to advance our Koori issues. John Howard always said: 'to give Aboriginal people land rights would cause division.' I have news for him, we have never been one nation! We have lived in a divided society all our lives as Kooris. Look at lan McLachlan, sacked over the Hindmarsh affair yet in the Howard Government he got back on the front bench. In Queensland, Pauline Hanson said she would not work for Aboriginal people only other Australians, and Bob Katter has said similar things. All these racist people in Parliament, no wonder we don't have a voice in this country. Racist multicultural Australia!

I keep asking myself, why didn't this country educate and elevate us Aboriginal people as a natural resource, before they adopted a multicultural nation attitude? But no, the powers that be in Canberra will never let Aboriginal people get enough political power to become land owners in our own country, because if they did we'd become a threat to their security.

As freehold owners of Aboriginal lands, the only land rights we have now is Crown land, which is not being used for any governmental purpose, and is no good for anything! I have been researching for the last 30 years into our Koori history, and, the more I research the angrier I become, because I can see just how much we Kooris have been written out of the history of this land, known once as 'Terra Australis', the 'great south land' or 'New Holland'. It was never Terra Nullis as they claimed!

Living as Australia's Working Poor

Elisabeth Wynhausen. *Dirt Cheap: Life At The Wrong End of the Job Market.* Pan Macmillan: Sydney, 2005.

By Evelyn Hartogh

When Elisabeth Wynhausen, a 55 year old, well respected, established journalist, decided to take nine months leave from her job at *The Australian* to investigate minimum wage jobs in Australia by going under cover as an employee, her family and friends tried to talk her out of it. Nonetheless, Wynhausen embarked on what would prove to be a far more exhausting, isolating and physically injurious year than she expected. She was inspired by Barbara Ehrenreich's book *Nickel and Dimed* which detailed a similar project in America.

Wynhausen expected that in Australia she would encounter experiences very different to those described in Ehrenreich's account of trying to live in America on the minimum wage. After all, Australian wages are not as low, and we have a social security safety net. Also, many Australians do not believe we have a strict class structure, and it is also widely believed that anyone who is willing to work hard can be financially secure. With those beliefs, and many others she only became aware of in the course of her new working life, Wynhausen set out to discover what it meant to live just over the poverty line.

At first, she was scared of being discovered as an undercover journalist but found repeatedly that her fabricated work history was never checked for authenticity. All the employers cared about was whether she would be available for work at a moment's notice any time she was needed, and would accept a job without being fully briefed on the conditions of employment.

The jobs she did ranged from the hospitality industry, including working in a private club, and a reasonably up-market hotel, to cleaning offices, sorting eggs in a factory, being the classic checkout chick at a super market, and working in nursing homes. *Dirt Cheap* humanises abstract facts and figures by blending current statistics, research findings and the out-of-touch opinions of right wing newspaper columnists with her day-to-day experiences in these immensely demanding workplaces. Not only does she discover just how hard it is to live on the minimum wage, but she is shaken by how painful the loss of identity and status is. The lack of unity, and the absence of voice among the working poor was only one of the many culture shocks Wynhausen felt.

In the majority of these workplaces she found a culture of hostility and suspicion among workers. Aside from one of the hotels, and one of the nursing homes, Wynhausen found very little friendliness or camaraderie between workers. In this assumption of instant inclusivity she reveals one of the many romanticisations of the working class to which the middle class adhere, namely notions of a noble love of hard, dirty work, and of a strong supportive community amongst the poorest, lowest paid workers. Instead, Wynhausen found that people in these minimum wage jobs do not even think of themselves as

working class. Nor do they do feel as if they are in a community of people with shared goals but instead behave as if they are competing with one another, willing to sell out their fellow workers just to keep their job in these high turnover, increasingly casualised industries.

While Wynhausen was shocked at both the hard physical labour and the complexity of tasks in so-called 'unskilled' jobs, she was even more shocked that many of the people doing them thought they had a 'good' job. Even more surprising to her, was that even when fellow workers acknowledged health and safety problems in the workplace, or bullying or abuse by supervisors, the idea of complaining or campaigning for change did not cross their minds at all. Workers were completely accepting of their state of powerlessness, even to the point of seeing it as some form of invisible natural order, unable to be questioned because of its inherent immutability. Workers were willing to accept conditions dangerous to their health and safety, and were thankful for any work they could find, no matter how insecure or badly paid. This acceptance, and gratitude about even having a job in the first place, was partly because workers were aware of much worse jobs on offer, and they would rather be on the minimum wage than on the dole (which is less than half of minimum wage)

Since Wynhausen planned to test the liveability of the minimum wage she set out to find an affordable place to live close to her workplace (even though she already owned a house and therefore would not have had the added stress and pressure of being a day away from homelessness like many Australians seeking employment). Deciding she would not lower her standards to live in a flat where she would have to share a bathroom with other tenants she found her options very limited. Finding affordable self-contained housing was much more difficult than she had anticipated, and Wynhausen was shocked to find that half of her wages would have to go on paying rent, and that it was almost impossible to live any closer than a 30-40 minute drive away from her place of employment. This harsh reality made her aware of her good fortune of having bought a house in Sydney before the property boom and having been in secure permanent employment in the course of her working life.

Her expectation that finding work would be easy and quick was proved wrong time and time again, and her expectation that once she found work it would be easy, since it was unskilled, was also shown to be incorrect. Instead she discovered that the application process was time consuming, expensive and complex and that, once employed, she needed to rapidly learn a wide range of skills and be able to do multiple tasks extremely quickly. Wynhausen never ceased to be amazed at the lack of adequate training, and the lack of any support for safety measures.

She suffered from numerous injuries in her workplaces and was forced to accept abuse and alienation. In attempting to live on her wage she was forced to give up many luxuries she had previously taken for granted, such as a night out with friends, or going out for breakfast at a café. She was shocked at what her fellow workers accepted without question or protest. However, since she did not share the same sense of powerlessness, or the sense that she was unable to change her working conditions, and since she was simply on a research field trip with plenty more jobs to investigate, Wynhausen was always able to leave a job once it became too much to bear. At times she was also able to stand up to employers as she left, since after all she had no need of a reference, nor needed ever to return to that workplace again. Sadly this is not the case for most Australians, who would not dare challenge their employer because of the need for good references and flexible work options, and who, due to the humility required (and the humiliation incurred) in a minimum wage job would often have given up searching for something better.

At the end of the day Wynhausen had a good secure job, and a fully paid off house to which to return. She soon lost her fear of being discovered as an undercover journalist when she realised just how much of a non-person you are when you work as a waiter, a cleaner, a factory hand, or a shop assistant. Continually she found herself being treated so badly she could barely believe it, again showing how much she had previously taken for granted the respect and friendship of her work colleagues. As much as *Dirt Cheap* is an expose of what life is like on the minimum wage, it also is an exposure of just how much the middle classes have become ignorant of their status, even to the extent of not even seeing themselves as privileged, until such privileges are taken away. Many middle class Australians consider themselves to be struggling, yet like Wynhausen they take for granted many luxuries about which people on lower wages can only dream.

Dirt Cheap gives a wonderfully honest and well-needed contribution to the body of knowledge regarding working conditions in Australia and, perhaps unintentionally, it also gives voice to the many assumptions the middle class make about the working class. Wynhausen continually finds her expectations are utterly incompatible with reality – which in itself suggests that the divisions between socio-economic classes in Australia have become so wide that neither have an accurate understanding of the lived experience of the other. Wynhausen points out that while the senior executives at Centrelink went from earning $85, 888 in 1997/98 to $128,165 by 2003/4 (a rise of over $40 000), New Start allowance itself has not increased in keeping with the rising costs of living; and while it has become harder to qualify for a social security benefit (which is less than $12 000 a year), the obligations and penalties have increased at an astronomical rate. Meanwhile, homelessness is higher than ever, another frequently ignored side effect of the supposed low unemployment figures.

What conservatives and the wealthy minorities fail to mention is that 'employed', according to the Howard government, can mean as little as one hour per fortnight, and that almost a quarter of the working population is in casual employment, which means their hours (and therefore wages) are unpredictable and unreliable, and they have no sick leave entitlements or holiday pay, or any of the benefits enjoyed by permanent workers. If they are receiving any Social Security benefits these will be cut at 50 cents in the dollar after earning only $62 dollars in a fortnight, and 70 cents in the dollar after earning $142. They would also have to declare the hours they worked before being paid for them, and predict the pay rate accurately or risk hefty penalty cuts to their payment (fines which are not one-off but are instituted into their rate of benefit for up to a year, and increased on any further breaches, until they might find themselves cut off and unable to claim benefits for a specified period of time).

A full benefit with rent assistance is half as much as the $450 per week gross wage of a full time minimum wage job and, as Wynhausen found, very difficult to survive on – in fact almost impossible unless you have savings or family to rely upon. What is more disconcerting is that conditions for workers will only get more insecure following John Howard's erosion of unfair dismissal laws. The notion of individual contracts does not take into account the poverty and desperation of people seeking work, and their sense of powerlessness in the face of employers who, essentially, hold all the money, and therefore all the power.

John Howard's attacks on universities, unions, cutbacks to public services and encouragement of the private sector has been intentionally divisive, making each section of the population suspicious and jealous of the other, each believing everyone else has it easier when really only the few at the top are reaping the benefits of Howard's economic reforms. As Wynhausen discovered, life is not easy for those seeking work, and once that work is found it is not possible to have the standard of living that

hard work is supposed to reap. Workplaces are increasingly hostile with employees suspicious of each other as well as intimidated by their employers, and working conditions have often become downright dangerous. Class divisions in Australia are stronger than ever, but what is frightening is the denial that they even exist. This denial of the power held by employers over employees means that workers continue to accept often appalling working conditions, insecure employment, physical injury, and workplaces that are debilitating to their mental health.

The prosperity that John Howard claims we have, where more Australians are in work, buying houses, going out to dinner, and generally being upwardly mobile, may be prosperity for the few. It is mere survival for the majority.

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Sleeping with the Guru

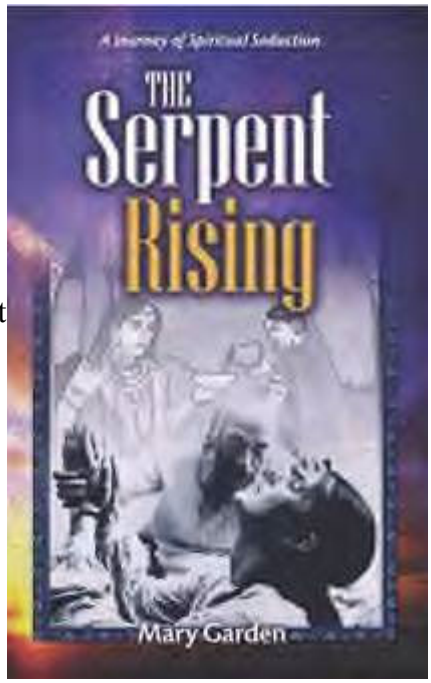
Mary Garden, *The Serpent Rising:A Journey of Spiritual Seduction*, Revised edition. Hartwell, Victoria: Sid Harta Publishers, 2002.

By Ann Faraday

> When a guru's not engaged in meditation
> A-reciting of his mantra for the week,
> His capacity for infantile inflation
> Is enough to drive disciples up the creek.
> He will take the girls aside for tantric yoga
> While celibacy's ordered for the chaps;
> If he starts behaving like an angry ogre
> He will claim it's just to make your pride collapse.
> Oh, with all this yogic practice to be done,
> A disciple's lot is not a happy one.

This little poem by John Wren-Lewis was inspired by *The Policemen's Chorus* from The *Pirates of Penzance,* and the first (1988) edition of *The Serpent Rising* by Mary Garden.

Sometime in 1980, John Wren-Lewis, my daughter Fiona and I found ourselves on a crowded Indian bus, sitting next to a young Western woman dressed from top to toe in white, who seemed oblivious to the heat, noise and smells around us. 'It's a very long, tiring journey,' she said, advising us to pull our scarves over our faces and focus our minds inwardly in order to shut out the general mayhem that would be our fate for the next eight hours. I wondered if she belonged to some religious group, a Hindu nun perhaps. Anyway, we were glad to have her company, as she obviously knew her way around.



It turned out that she was a New Zealander called Mary Garden who had left home many years earlier to find her guru in India. Her first stop had been a visit to the (in)famous miracle-working guru, Sathya Sai Baba, ending after several months as she observed the rich and powerful receiving private *darshan* from the Master, while she and other impoverished but serious devotees were ignored. There were also rumours of his sexual molestation of young boys, later to be confirmed by Western ex-disciples. 'At least Rajneesh and his followers were open about sex,' she said, adding that her later years at the Poona ashram had been very positive, mainly on account of the all the therapies available from skilled Western group leaders.

She tells of these ashram adventures in her book, and they are lively enough. But the main story centres on her years at the Rishikesh ashram of a beautiful boy-yogi, Swami Balyogi Premvarni. I don't recall her mentioning this on the bus, probably because she was still raw and hurting from her years as his disciple. Nor would the details of his constant sexual demands ('just raising your kundalini') and her pregnancy and late-term abortion ('your bad karma catching up with

you'), have been suitable conversation on a crowded Indian bus – quite apart from all the weird yoga and 'cleansing' rituals she had to suffer, including the ingestion of post-coital seminal fluids mixed with cream and honey ('nectar of the gods'). The first we heard about all this was in 1988, a couple of years after we settled in Australia, when we turned on the TV one morning to find Ray Martin interviewing her on *The Midday Show* about the newly published first edition of her book. I recall that he interrupted the interview more than once to advise about giving away too much of her story prematurely, but I suspect he was really concerned about the sensibilities of his typically conservative daytime audience! It turned out that Mary was living in Brisbane, and we've kept in touch, on and off, ever since.

So I was interested to compare the two editions of *The Serpent Rising*, fifteen years apart. The first was presented as fiction with no mention of Swami Balyogi's name or her own as the heroine. The second is the autobiography it really is. Mary tells us that her main reason for the revision was that guru-abuse can now be openly admitted and discussed. Moreover, she believed her story might help all the conflicted young people who had posted their own distressing experiences of this particular yogi on the Internet. Most had been puzzled, confused and disturbed by his outlandish behaviour, asking themselves the very same question as Mary had been asking herself for over two decades: *Is it him or me? Was he 'testing' me or is he downright abusive?* His Yogant Foundation web site currently extols his skills as a spiritual master and yoga teacher, adding that: 'The gems of wisdom and love which radiate from his heart deeply uplift the spirits of those who experience the blessings of his presence.' Mary felt it was clearly time to expose him.

I know, I know, I know – I can hear the $64,000 question reverberating throughout cyberspace even as I write. It was my question too. It was Mary's question to which she has still not found a convincing answer. *Why on earth did this highly educated and intelligent young woman allow herself to be so abused?* What's really going on? Mary puts the blame squarely on the nature of the guru-disciple relationship itself, pointing out that it is probably the most authoritarian structure in the world, with its demand for total surrender and obedience, and hence potentially the most destructive of relationships. 'We were seduced by yogis and swamis telling us what we wanted to hear: *that we were special and they were God-incarnate,*' she writes. 'Our need was our downfall. In the final analysis the authority of the guru is bestowed on him by the disciple.'

Indeed! Here, I believe, Mary has hit at least one spiritual nail on the head – the desperate need of almost everyone to feel *special*. This is the subject of a recent timely piece in the magazine *What is Enlightenment*? (Issue 26: Aug-Oct 2004) entitled 'Women Who Sleep with their Gurus – and why they love it.' The author, Jessica Roemischer, interviewed ten women who had slept with their gurus, some of them now spiritual teachers themselves. 'If your husband's a doctor, then you're special. If you're with Mick Jagger, you're special. If you're sleeping with your Tibetan lama, you're special,' said one. Another woman sleeping with a prominent American spiritual teacher explained that all the attention made her feel special 'like Radha – a spiritual goddess', words which might have come directly from Mary's story when she recounts how 'one full moon night, I experienced a love that seemed to cross boundaries of personal love… the whole universe seemed to be dancing with light and I truly felt as if I was Radha, the most beloved of the gopis, with whom Krishna sported in the lila of love.' Which is all very cosmically gratifying until Krishna takes a fancy to another Radha (as he invariably does), whereupon mayhem descends. Hell hath no fury like a devotee scorned, as many gurus have found to their (literal) cost!

In her fascinating and well-researched article in *What Is Enlightment?*, Jessica explores the myriad conscious and unconscious urges, which lead women to sleep with powerful males. But I feel she may be more than a little simplistic in simply asking why we shouldn't expect women to be able to take responsibility for their own personal and spiritual lives, even in the face of a corrupt spiritual teacher. 'Women now have the freedom to go beyond instinct, beyond social and biological conditioning ... taking responsibility for our spiritual journey beyond self-serving desires, facing directly and honestly into what *we* have brought to the situation, and consciously disengaging the age-old structures that no longer serve us.'

I'm sure that Mary would agree – in theory at least. But I think she'd also like to point out that there was more to her spiritual search than merely finding a father figure or satisfying a neurotic need for attention. 'I want to find out who I am and what is the meaning of life,' she had written on her application to join the ashram. 'I want to find out the truths behind this universe.' Later when she became disenchanted, she constantly asked herself whether in rejecting her teacher she would be rejecting God. 'If we did not believe in Swamiji and maintain our faith, then the whole structure of our dreams of becoming more spiritual would crumble around us – to leave would mean returning to the lives we were tired of, dissatisfied with. To stay would mean that, in spite of the harshness of Swamiji's teachings, we would taste things we had never tasted before and would probably be unlikely to taste anywhere else.'

Mary subtitled her book *A Journey of Spiritual Seduction.* Is she implying that the real villain of the piece is not really her dominating swami, his needy women, or even the authoritarian structure of the guru-disciple relationship, but the very nature of the spiritual quest itself? Exploration into God is tantalizing, exciting and – dare we say it – erotic. It always was and always will be. How many of us can resist that call? And should we?

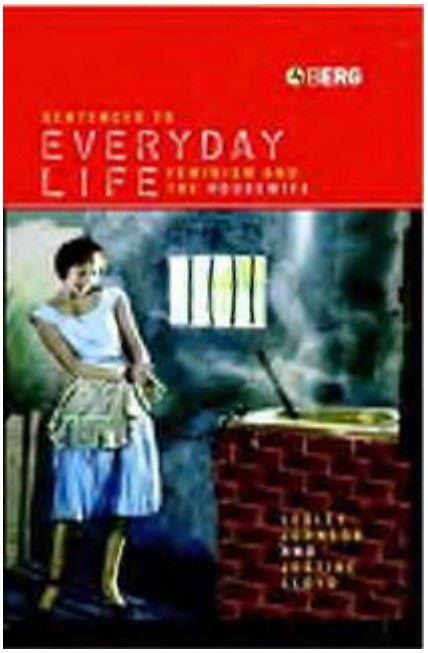
The Serpent Rising **is available at most bookstores or can be ordered by emailing Mary Garden direct (see <http://www.users.bigpond.com/marygarden/order.htm> $19.95 + $5 p&h) or internationally from Amazon.**

Not So Desperate Housewives

Lesley Johnson and Justine Lloyd, *Sentenced to Everyday Life: Feminism and the Housewife,* Oxford: Berg, 2004.

By Margaret Henderson

In these strange times of Tax Benefit A and Tax Benefit B, managerialism's 'kindly' rhetoric of balancing work and family responsibilities, and a declining birth rate and nuclear family, a feminist study of the housewife couldn't be more topical or strategic. Lesley Johnson and Justine Lloyd's *Sentenced to Everyday Life: Feminism and the Housewife* has an intriguing title and a great cover — resembling a 1950s pulp novel, complete with suffering Aussie housewife in a nice pair of heels chained to a laundry copper (actually an advertisement for the sadly missed 'National Washing Machine Month', 1958). 'Sentenced to everyday life' is how Henri Lefebvre described women's repetitious domestic role in modernity (150): a woman's time before Kristeva's 'women's time'. Johnson and Lloyd 'are interested in the way feminism since the Second World War appears to have had a troubled relationship with the figure of the housewife'; indeed, they aim to show how the housewife functioned as Other to modern feminists (2). And as befitting any good Other, the housewife 'has been productive of a particular form of feminist subjectivity', namely, the woman who leaves domesticity for the freedom and autonomy of work and the public sphere, an identity which they argue 'has been in trouble for some time now' (3). And so I was looking forward to an account that maps the figure of the housewife, and which might suggest how feminism might intervene in the contradictory socioeconomic space facing straight white women in Australia now.



In the last few years a semi-genre of feminist work has been taking shape which could be termed the neo-recuperative cultural history (to distinguish it from earlier Marxist and feminist historical revisionings), and it is within this corpus that I classify *Sentenced to Everyday Life*. It sets out to show how second wave feminism got it wrong, whether about the media, popular culture, race, motherhood, heterosexuality, and now the housewife; and by way of a usually Foucauldian-derived methodology of discourse analysis, the work recuperates the previously maligned site, era, or figure and restores them to agency and/or political 'complexity'. The focus is firmly on representation; the preferred forms of evidence are cultural texts and bureaucratic writings; and the methodology is a semi or non-literary studies mode of close reading that results in much description. Throughout, the characteristic tone is Gallically austere and objective, with an occasional but symptomatic slip into prolixity (signalling the meeting of social theory with cultural studies). One appeal of the neo-recuperative history is its underlying optimism: no matter what gets re-observed, it is never as bad or as simple as previous accounts argued. There is always some austere hope for the past, and for those things we once criticised or disavowed.

In the particular case of *Sentenced to Everyday Life*, the housewife of the 1940s and 1950s is the figure to be recuperated, not from patriarchy or bourgeois ideology, but from feminism. How times have changed. The authors wish to provide 'a different history of the housewife than second wave feminism has provided for her to date, and thus to enable a different history to be told of the relationship between

feminism and the housewife in the 1960s and 1970s' (3). The focus is on Australia in the immediate post-war period, and the authors analyse early second wave feminist texts, the discourse of housewives' associations, newspaper and magazine advertisements on house design, three Hollywood films, women's radio programs, and the emotion of boredom as specific to the housewife condition. They aim to show that in such texts the housewife was a quite contradictory figure, and had much more agency and political consciousness than usually assumed. Given the postmodernisation of the imaginary 1950s confronting us now (Work harder! Have babies! Consume more! Look really nice while you self-realise and renovate!), this is an important project. Unfortunately, the book does not always meet its stated aims: feminism might be positioned as a framing device, but it stays an underdeveloped presence in the argument.

Sentenced to Everyday Life begins strongly with its analysis of early second wave feminism's version of the unhappy housewife, specifically the work of Betty Friedan, Germaine Greer, and Ann Oakley. Johnson and Lloyd make the interesting point that these books function as conduct books for women, and that they seemed to resolve the tension between domesticity and public achievement by the strategy of leaving domesticity behind. A mention is made of Australian feminist histories, particularly Gisela Kaplan's (whose work is unfairly compared to Friedan and Greer). Apart from a small section in chapter two and in the conclusion, and the occasional brief aside, the analysis of feminism's housewife ends here. This truncation is the book's biggest weakness: what about discussing more contemporary feminist writing? debates about wages for housework? the housewives' strike? the activism of the Union of Australian Women? or feminist research into Aboriginal domestic labour as underpinning white household structures? As that short list suggests, housewives and the domestic was a fraught and complex site for women's movement theorising and activism.

The next chapter, on housewives' associations, is more convincing. It looks at the way women spoke as housewives in this period, the problematic meanings of home and the role of women post-second world war, and the kinds of identities contained under the signifier, 'housewife'. There is a tendency here, and elsewhere, however, to avoid confrontation with conservative forces or the dominant culture's attempts to control the housewife, especially during Menzies' rule (hence it seems that the book is more interested in making feminism the villain rather than wider social or ideological formations). The following chapter follows a similar tack: it uses advertisements and articles from the *Women's Weekly* to outline a specific housewifely agency of the era. That is, the housewife, by correct patterns of consumption and taste, was to bring modernity home by designing the dream house, and hence she could erase the tensions of private and public realms (and of class — a rather unproblematised category).

Chapter Four, 'The Three Faces of Eve', reads three Hollywood melodrama films of the 1940 and 50s (*Mildred Pierce*, *Come Back Little Sheba*, and *The Three Faces of Eve*) to add further evidence that texts focussing on or addressing the housewife did not set up the myth of the happy housewife rather, but 'explored the tensions of modernity and femininity' (89). This chapter sits uneasily with the rest of the book – whether it is the type of texts under discussion, the wordiness of some of the prose, or the long discussion of melodrama, for whatever reason it doesn't quite work. The films, at least in the way they are paraphrased, seem to pull against some of the readings made, which points to a more general problem throughout the book. Texts, whether women's magazines, film, or radio programs, may be able to be read as showing the contradictions of being a housewife instead of constructing a myth of the happy housewife (though I'm sure I could find plenty of examples of mythmaking – try men's magazines of the time). More importantly, they also show how the contradictions can be resolved so

that the happy housewife triumphs, and hence is reproduced as cultural ideal and dominant.

The final chapter uses articles and letters in the *Women's Weekly*, and the ABC radio program, 'Women's Session' to explore boredom as a gendered response to everyday modern life, and as a crucial part of a specifically feminine structure of feeling. Johnson and Lloyd provide a very detailed analysis to argue that the discussion of women's boredom in these spaces undermined the housewifely ideal. The tension between what the dominant culture wants from the housewives, and what they want to say, is made clear.

The book ends with a thought-provoking conclusion. According to *Sentenced to Everyday Life*, boredom, along with the self-consciousness of the housewife and her role as heroine of modernity, were the enabling conditions for the feminist subject to emerge in the mid to late 1960s, even though the housewife is 'the abject self of feminism' (154). I agree with their diagnosis, although the book is largely about the dominant culture's, rather than feminism's imaginings. This raises the question: what is the housewife for the dominant culture? Yet for the authors, and typically for the neo-recuperative history, it is feminism that has failed women. They assert that feminism has failed 'to insist that the separation of home and work and the way the home remains a gendered space must always be central to its concerns and critique' (154). Again, this is a very partial and monolithic view of feminism. Which feminism are we talking about? The weakened form of liberal feminism that is left in EEO programs, managerialism and the bureaucracy? Or the large body of feminist work across feminist philosophy, geography, architecture, political theory, the social sciences, and cultural studies, which has consistently argued over the years for the gendered nature of space, and the limitations of the separation of private and public spheres? Feminism doesn't make its own or broader history as it pleases, even if it does reconceptualise time and space.

Sentenced to Everyday Life is particularly strong at locating the tensions between modernity and femininity, and emphasising the housewife's agency. It provides a detailed account of some of the shifts in the identity of the Australian housewife in the 1940s and 1950s, (though an extension into the 1960s would have been interesting and helped to connect more compellingly the history with nascent women's liberation). But in their refiguration of the housewife, some of the categories that make such a historically specific and recent identity come into being, such as the economy, work, heterosexuality, whiteness, the nuclear family, choice, and marriage, are left too unproblematised or unremarked. The study is, nonetheless, an interesting addition to stories of feminist origins and (dis)identifications. Johnson and Lloyd make the provocative claim that feminism needs the housewife as a politico-logical supplement, for she forces a re-evaluation of work, time, space, success, identity, and self-realisation, and in our over-worked, atomised, hypercompetitive and consumerist society, this sounds appealing. Of course, as the authors signal, more changes are afoot, as domestic labour and care is globalised and commodified, with women from poor non-white countries becoming the servant class and the emotional labourers for rich white nations. While the authors conclude that feminism must take seriously women's desire to stay home and have children, what might this form of 'choice' mean in such a context?

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Breaking With Insistent Domesticity

Catherine Speck, *Painting Ghosts: Australian Women Artists in Wartime*.
Melbourne: Craftsman House, 2004.

By Maryanne Dever

It is fascinating how some books find their moment. No doubt when Catherine Speck first began researching Australian women artists in wartime, the dearth of work on the subject was one of its attractions as a field of inquiry. *Painting Ghosts* arrives, however, at a moment of considerable renewed interest both in the individual women artists Speck profiles and in the wider questions concerning the role of our artists in provoking debate over the meanings of war, both abroad and on the home-front. Following in the wake of Drusilla Modjeska's *Stravinsky's Lunch* (1999) which offered new readings of the lives of Stella Bowen and Grace Cossington-Smith, in 2003 there came the Australian War Memorial travelling exhibition of Bowen's work, including many of her most haunting works from her time as an official war artist in Britain. A major retrospective exhibition of Cossington-Smith's work – featuring many of the paintings Speck discusses - is currently showing at the National Gallery in Canberra. And Betty Churcher's television documentary series *The Art of War*, with its accompanying book, appeared as a nicely timed gesture for Anzac Day this year. All of the above have contributed to broadening our awareness of Australian women artists' engagement with themes of war and conflict, but the value of Speck's study comes from her capacity to provide a larger context in which to read and examine the careers of both the better known artists such as Bowen, Nora Heysen and Cossington-Smith, and those who remain more obscure. The questions she poses about the relationship between gender, culture, history-making and nationhood are important and timely ones.

Speck acknowledges at the outset that our dominant cultural myths tend to align masculinity, rather than femininity, with all matters military, thus obscuring the diverse roles that women play during war. 'The widely accepted view that during the First World War Australian women spent countless hours knitting socks for soldiers', she observes, 'does little justice to the complexity of ways women assisted with the war effort and engaged with the issues of the day'. Similarly, there has been a widespread assumption that the task of representing war is solely the province of male artists, an assumption that left Speck defending her choice of women war artists as a research topic against the charge that there could be little for her to write about ('But are there any?'). Her study tackles these issues head-on, examining both the role and output of women war artists and, through their works, a diverse set of representations of women's war-time activities. 'What better way', she asks, 'to re-shape the association of meanings of women and war and peace than by focusing on women artists' immediate responses to the national events they found themselves immersed in, how they represented the women and men involved, and whether they did this as a spontaneous record of their life in the services, as an official war artist or as a private citizen.'

Painting Ghosts covers the period from the First World War through to Australia's recent involvement in East Timor. Unlike Canada and Great Britain, during the First World War Australia neither appointed women as official war artists nor commissioned works from women artists. Florence Rodway's 1921

portrait of Brigadier General MacLaurin was the only commissioned work by a woman to enter the collection of the newly established Australian War Museum in that period. Indeed, it was not until the 1970s, no doubt influenced in part by second wave feminist challenges to women's position more generally within the history of art, that the Australian War Memorial, under the direction of curator Judith McKay, began to acquire women's wartime art from the Great War and subsequent conflicts. As Speck notes, 'most women's wartime art has been acquired by the Australian War Memorial over the last three decades'. Despite the efforts of women artists following the First World War to sell or donate their works to the Australian War Museum (as it was known then), officials showed no interest in including their works in the collection. 'It seems the women were not considered to possess a legitimate "voice" … their portrayals were not deemed central to these events. The representational form the official male war artists gave to these events, diverse as it was, was considered to be a more authentic account.'

That these women's work could not been read as legitimate war art is perhaps not surprising given that most departed in their themes from the more familiar representations of the testing physical nature of war or of battles set against a harsh landscape, images that echoed the story of the 'birth of a nation' promulgated in C.E.W. Bean's influential history of that same conflict. 'What is so confronting about the women's art', writes Speck, 'is that it challenges the narrowness of the founding myth, presenting a richer account of the birth of the nation'. In contrast, then, to the more familiar desert landscapes of George Lambert's paintings of the Australian Light Horse Brigade in Palestine or Septimus Power's images of trench warfare on the Western Front, Speck asks us to consider Ethel Carrick Fox's painting, Luxembourg Gardens (1918), in which she depicts a spare autumn landscape at Armistice time with only a lone soldier figure present, or Janet Cumbrae-Stewart's remarkable and moving portrait of her friend and fellow artist, Jessie Traill in her 'Portrait of Jessie Traill' in the Uniform of Queen Alexandra's Military Imperial Nurses (1920). As Speck introduces us to the field hospital drawings of Iso Rae, who was nursing in France, and offers compelling new readings of Cossington-Smith's paintings of troop departures, and Vida Lahey's and Evelyn Chapman's paintings of post-Armistice London and France, she draws attention to the fact that what happened behind the front lines, on the home-front and among the ruins also forms part of the story of this, or indeed any, conflict. In making her case for women's contribution to the realm of Australian war art, Speck argues persuasively that we need a more flexible definition of precisely what constitutes 'war art'.

Speck's account of the First World War is followed by chapters covering the roles of Nora Heysen, Stella Bowen and Sybil Craig, all officially appointed as war artists across the course of the Second World War. Speck makes the case that, while appointment as official war artists represented recognition of these women's abilities, they were inevitably hampered in their work by many more restrictions than their male counterparts: they were kept a long way from the action most of the time and encouraged principally to document the work of women in the Australian services. Heysen was the first woman to take up such an appointment and she was also the first woman appointed to work in forward areas. Her assignment was largely designed for her to cover the activities of Australian nurses in New Guinea. Before she left Australia, however, Heysen completed seven portraits of the heads of the Australian women's services, the highest-ranking women in the country. This assignment presented Heysen with the enormous challenge of working out how to represent the power and authority of rank when the ranking serviceperson was a woman and the traditions of military portraiture were tailored to emphasising martial masculinity. Heysen's portraits successfully allay fears that women are either essentially out of place in uniform or, if not, must have sacrificed their femininity. As Speck observes, 'the women wear their uniforms with a natural air, while the paintings convey the confidence with

which these women have appropriated symbols of male authority and forms of male display in their dress and turned them into feminine fashion'. Both Heysen's commission and these seven portraits go to the heart of Speck's investigation in this book by highlighting the considerable cultural tensions surrounding both the appropriate place of women and the meaning of all things feminine in the domain of war.

While many people are probably increasingly familiar with Stella Bowen's wartime work, especially her eerie portraits of ill-fated young bomber crews, the work of Sybil Craig is less well-known. Craig was only appointed as a war artist in March of 1945, and carried out most of her assignment in munitions and explosives factories around Melbourne. For many of us, the most enduring images of Melbourne in war-time come from Albert Tucker's paintings of sexual licence and debased femininity in works such as Pick-up (1941) and Victory Girls (1943). Craig's images of the home-front sit in stark contrast to Tucker's. Her work is striking in the way in which it shows 'feminine' women taking on the highly skilled and frankly dangerous work they had once been excluded from as a consequence of their sex. The women in Craig's paintings are focused, professional and highly competent, and by bringing her modernist style into these highly industrialised settings, Craig marked a break with the insistent domesticity of much earlier Australian modernist work. 'However', Speck writes, 'there is a also a continuous thread with the modernism of the 1920s and 1930s, in that women are portrayed as very much in control of their world…[Craig] also shows how women redefined their feminine self according to their needs and those of a nation at war'.

Speck's study concludes with a postscript covering the work of flamboyant artist Wendy Sharpe, only the fourth woman appointed to the post of official war artist and one of two Australians sent to cover the Australian forces in East Timor. One can only wonder what the earlier generations of women artists covered in this book might have made of Sharpe's nude portrait of Corporal Alicia Carr (who had asked Sharpe to do something Carr could send to her absent boyfriend). While Sharpe reflected that the posting made her feel at times 'like a bohemian flower that's been thrown into a warzone', her output of 64 works must inevitably add to our collective national understanding of what Speck terms the 'human side to rebuilding after the conflict'.

Like all survey works in art history, Speck is ultimately only able to engage with a portion of the output of the many talented women she has gathered under her broader (and more satisfying) definition of Australian women's war art. She nevertheless provides a fascinating new lens though which to examine these women's work together with a persuasive set of arguments concerning gender, war and representation in Australian visual culture.

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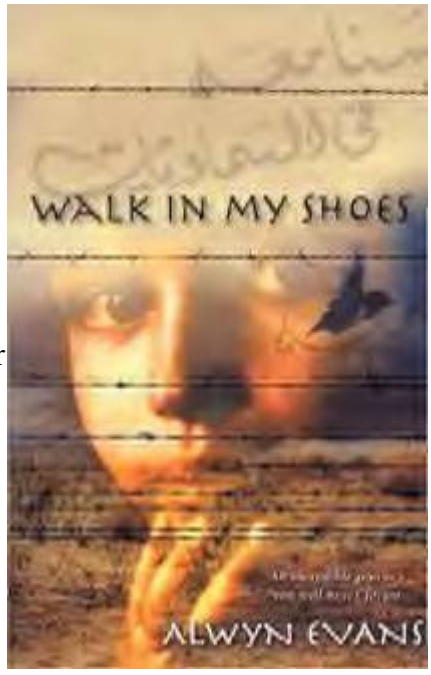
Traumas of Incarceration

Review of Alwyn Evans, *Walk In My Shoes*. Penguin. 2004.

By Rachael Blair

In 2002 the film based on Doris Pilkington's *Rabbit Proof Fence* caused a metaphorical hurricane of anger to sweep across Australia as it alerted viewers to the inhumane treatment of Aboriginal people, resulting from State governments' policies and laws. We watched in horror as young children whose skin was lighter than that of their tribal families, were snatched away and transported to institutions, 'for their own good'. In horror yes, but also in relief that such appalling laws were buried in our past.

Walk In My Shoes by Alwyn Evans destroys this myth. It alerts readers to a current Australia most Australians would prefer to pretend does not exist. I must admit that before reading this impressive exposé, I was one of the 'unthinking' who unashamedly assumed the stories in the media about refugees imprisoned in our country's detention centres, were fact. After all I'd seen pictures of their animalistic behaviour as they climbed fences in protest, hadn't I? Television does not lie. Or does it?



Evans' debut novel challenges a stereotypical image of asylum seekers – but it is not just a political comment. *Walk in My Shoes* is also a coming of age novel about love, family relationships, and the difficulties of growing up torn between two cultures.

It opens with Gulnessa, the sixteen year old female protagonist, realising she must record her experiences over the past few years – to validate sacrifices made and traumas endured. Structured in two parts, the story of Nessa (as she prefers to be called) begins when her family, and friend Abdul, unsure of where they were being taken after escaping war-torn Afghanistan, arrive in the north-west of Australia.

'Are we really safe here?' Ironically, immediately following Nessa's first words on Australian shores, her family is imprisoned in a detention centre. It is in this Camp (as inmates call it) that readers experience some of the traumas faced by asylum seekers. Not only Gulnessa's but those facing all refugees. Through the family's experiences, the author explores the deterioration of mind, body and family relationships that is inevitable when people endure continuous stress which has no foreseeable end.

Although in the Author's Note at the back of the book Evans explains that the novel is based on experiences of real people, and that she has conducted extensive research, it is hard to accept what we learn about the Camp. Guards treat asylum seekers like numbers not people. Literally. They allocate to each refugee a code number to identify them, like jailbirds. Other conditions are comparable to prisons: guards supervise refugees during exercise hours in designated yards; guards supervise refugees at the 'mess' they are required to attend three times a day for simple meals; there is a nightly curfew; everywhere 'guards' supervise every activity. A minor character who testifies at a court case in Perth, later tells other refugees, 'Perth was like paradise and coming back here was like returning to hell.'

Effects of indefinite detention are many. Nessa's young sister, Zahra, withdraws into herself; her brother, Zainullah, becomes aggressive; and her mother, Fatimah, suffers depression, unable to look after herself and her four children. The strain on her relationship with Nessa becomes apparent as Nessa tries to shoulder the burden of looking after her two younger siblings.

Simultaneously, as they battle the traumas of incarceration in the Camp, the family experience their first taste of Western customs – adding a different kind of strain to traditional family roles. Noticing some of the roles and freedoms assumed by Western women, Nessa begins to question her mother's attitudes towards her brothers, Hassan and Zainullah. 'I felt a pang of resentment that the boys didn't have to do their own washing', and, 'I was annoyed. Boys *always* got to do things first.'

Interspersed throughout the main narrative, Nessa shares with us flashbacks to her life in Afghanistan, their escape, and their journey. These flashbacks take us into the past through the use of present tense, a technique which vividly portrays how the characters constantly relive their horrors which, although hopefully in the past, are ever present in their minds.

Yet, through the turmoil and despair, Evans includes a minor plot line of hope. In the hell of detention, Nessa and Abdul form a friendship that gives them both the strength to cope. At the end of Part One, this is stringently tested.

In the second part of the novel Nessa grows up. She learns a new culture, a new language, makes new Australian friends, and she also learns harsh realities about humankind. We follow the family's struggles to maintain their culture and reshape its internal relationships. They meet a broader spectrum of Australian citizens. Annie, a member of CARAD (Coalition for Asylum Seekers, Refugees and Detainees), enters their lives. She welcomes refugees, and goes out of her way to ensure they are safe and comfortable, helping them battle for a new life.

Still, looming over the family's new experiences, even joys, however, is an ever present threat of not receiving permanent visas.

Walk in My Shoes not only has all the ingredients of a good novel, it is a good read too. The narrative, although related in the first person by Nessa, develops characters into three-dimensional people with whom we either easily sympathise or fundamentally oppose. Their horrific experiences drive the plot. Although the writing style is concise, often full of clever imagery and extremely easy to read, this is not why one should pick up the book.

Walk in My Shoes subtly informs us about cultural difference and diversity. It deals with issues sensationalised, yet trivialised, by the media, in a way that offers insight and empathy. It challenges readers to really think about their own position on human rights. It is a story that stays with you long after you finish. A story that will haunt you, make you feel angry, guilty, proud, ashamed and inspired all at once. Throughout the novel, Evans indirectly questions what it means to be an Australian, offering complex insights about this question. By the end, you will ask yourself similar questions. Are you proud or ashamed to be associated with the Australia portrayed in this story?

This is a novel that every Australian *must* read.

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Revisiting Australian Romance Fiction

Review of Juliet Flesch, *From Australia With Love: A History of Modern Australian Popular Romance Novels.* Perth: Curtin University Books, 2004.

By Fiona Giles

From Australia with Love is an ambitious book which aims to provide a historical overview of twentieth century popular romance fiction written in Australia. At the same time the author hopes to mount a literary defence of the writing as culturally and aesthetically valuable, rescuing it from the lowbrow romance ghetto and insisting that both its readership and its contents are more complex than traditional literary critics would have us believe. In addition, the author hopes to show how Australian women's romance is culturally distinctive; in her chapter 'The Beetroot in the Burger' she argues that there is an 'egalitarianism, independence of spirit, a sense of fair play and a sense of humour' (p. 251) which can be attributed to a uniquely Australian sensibility.

Flesch's critical and historical project is not a new one: there exists an abundance of studies of cultural texts specifically aimed at female audiences, from Tania Modleski's ground-breaking *Loving With A Vengeance: Mass-Produced Fantasies for Women* (1982) to my own book on nineteenth century Australian women's fiction, *Too Far Everywhere: The Romantic Heroine in Nineteenth Century Australia* (1998). More recently, Susan Hopkins' excellent *Girl Heroes: The New Force in Popular Culture*, (2002) looking at the rise of the female action heroine, shows how widely this school of criticism has extended and the richness of the vein it continues to mine. Indeed the passing into popular idiom of critical terms such as chick lit and chick flicks (or perhaps the passing into critical terminology of these pop terms) and their acceptance as culturally significant genres alongside airport novels and action movies reveals the degree to which the female mass market audience is now respected – both for its spending power and its critical smarts. Unfortunately Flesch's book does not acknowledge the wide range of this work. Although she refers to literary critical studies of popular romance, she has less interest in cultural and feminist studies, disciplines which have provided the most fruitful approaches to popular and women's culture. She reveals a snobbism towards television (which she considers less complex than literature) and fails to consider the evolution of the genre of romance through different forms and media (from Sappho to soaps, for example). This limits her grounds for defending the cultural value of her chosen novels.

Flesch's contribution to the field is in her history of the mass market romance novel in Australia, in particular the genre popularised here and in England by Mills and Boon (and in America by Harlequin). The book's chapters are organized first around a sociological taxonomy of publishing, that is, chapters one, two and three look respectively at the publishing companies and their marketing strategies; the romance writers; and the romance audience. The second section of the book – the following three chapters – looks at political issues raised by the texts in three key areas: power; sexuality; and race. The final chapter considers Australianness. The chapter on race is arguably the most interesting in the book, perhaps due to the freshness of the material, although it's a shame she doesn't mention two important Australian inter-racial romance texts: Ellen Clacy's 'Mikka' from *Lights and Shadows of Australian Bush Life* (1854), and the film *Jedda* (1954).

Flesch's study is hampered, in my view, by being too broadly conceived, in terms of its content, and under-theorised in terms of its conceptual apparatus. The book lacks an adequate history of the romance genre, which extends far beyond its twentieth century varieties, and even a glancing appraisal of this would help explain what it is that romance as a genre hopes to achieve, and why it matters. Perhaps even more problematically, there is no analysis of the gendering of romance, beyond its critical reception as trash – and no interrogation of the way in which 'trash' sub-cultures can offer a critique of the grounds for criticism. Although Flesch brings a fan's enthusiasm and considerable bibliographic knowledge to her readings, the book lacks a conceptual focus which would help to organize the material into a more memorable frame. The historical overview and bibliographic compendium has an important place in scholarship; but it is extremely difficult to combine this sweep of vision with detailed and sophisticated readings. Instead the book delivers an odd concoction of plot summary and critical generalization. The arguments tend to rely on repetition and an accretion of quotations for their persuasiveness, rather than logic. Additionally, her unproblematic adoption of concepts such as 'Australianness' reduces the impact of any defence of the work as culturally distinctive. Such a reading fails to perceive the way in which culture is itself formed by these texts, rather than merely a template against which to judge them. Unfortunately this chapter segues into a summary of translation errors in a selection of Australian romance novels rather than, more logically, making a comparative study of Australian, English and American heroines (to remain in the English speaking West) or, say, Indian and South East Asian heroines (to move beyond it).

Without wanting to diminish the importance of the book and its contribution to Australian cultural history, it suffers from a lack of awareness of recent cultural and feminist studies which would help to contextualise Flesch's own readings of the texts, and frame her own narrative more securely. Perhaps her sense of audience is also slightly askew, since the historical overview is too superficial for an academic audience, and her encyclopaedic reach too arcane for a general one. This instability is reflected in her tone, which is far from unreadable and occasionally both perky and arch, but shifts uneasily between references to her own discursive position as 'we' or 'one'. It would perhaps have been more revealing and engaging for Flesch to have included herself more squarely in the text.

Still, we do need more studies of Australian women's popular cultural texts – from romance fiction to women's sports coverage – and *From Australia with Love* provides a valuable source of references and critical starting points for future research. Despite its theoretical incoherence, the book offers some important empirical details about a vast cultural industry, and some intriguing glimpses into the intersection between community and consumption that occurs within vilified sub-cultures. Perhaps a full-length study of one of our more important romance writers, such as Dorothy Lucie Sanders (aka Lucy Walker) would have worked better, and acted as a hinge from which issues of marketing and politics could be articulated, but let's hope the existence of this book will make the existence of that one more likely.

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From Punk to Prestige

Burchill, Julie. *The Guardian Columns 1998-2000.* Orion. London: 2001.

By Evelyn Hartogh

Julie Burchill is an iconic figure in the United Kingdom, to the extent that she is talked about on soap operas and routinely has her personal life attacked by the tabloids. In the 1970s she wrote for the popular *New Music Express* (NME) and in the 1980s for the very hip style bible *The Face Magazine*. She has written several novels and articles for many of the major British newspapers, never forgetting her punk roots and thus creating many enemies. However, the controversy that she stirs up has never overshadowed her skill as a writer and her trademark of speaking the unspeakable truths.

This collection of the first three years of her 1998-2003 stint as columnist at *The Guardian* is highly enjoyable for both her practical feminist stance and her wonderful wit when she dares to fly against public opinion. Burchill's columns are generally a mixture of current affairs and personal confessional commentary, a style common to most newspaper opinion pieces. What sets Burchill apart is that she does not pander to the lowest common denominator by giving the public what they want, nor does she repeat the usual clichés already in circulation. However, she does not simply say reactionary things to be purely 'controversial', her columns are extremely well argued, and well constructed, and her ability to persuade with wit gives her work a literary quality without being overly pretentious. Her dislikes become common themes, often repeated almost verbatim over the years collected in this volume.

Whenever men's infidelity is discussed in the press like a badge of honour and 'the French' are used as some form of cultural benchmark, she likes to remind her readers that 'the French attitude to adultery fits in very well with the fact that French women didn't get the vote till 1945, that they have fewer women MPs than any other Western European country and that sexual harassment is considered something of a joke there' (12). The complete sexism of seeing unfaithful husbands as heroes is pointed out by Burchill when she comments that 'neither France nor America … would put up with a female leader who took it at all corners … they'd revile her as a complete slag, and then dump her' (81). When French men's misbehaviour is suggested to be more advanced she comments 'the French attitude to men, women and marriage is the last Western bastion of Victorian sexual values' (81) and remarks that 'the “civilised” nature of the traditional French marriage has always been as a by-product, not of enlightenment, but of repression' (141). Rather than simply coming across as a typical Englishwomen who hates her nearest neighbour, Burchill backs up her arguments with sobering facts such as, 'France Telecom was recently forced, at great cost, to discontinue issuing itemised bills after thousands of affairs were revealed to enraged wives who clearly weren't privy to the fact that, for a Frenchman, adultery is as natural as collaborating with invaders and blowing up Greenpeace vessels' (141) and worse, 'France … has one of the highest levels of male-on-female violent crime' (142).

Her most interesting method of pointing out sexism is to compare commonly accepted attitudes to women against language and attitudes that are seen as racist. She routinely ridicules sexist comments and practices by exposing how more glaringly discriminatory these things would look if for every time you heard the word 'woman' used derogatively you replaced it with 'black'. This practice of juxtaposition demonstrates the ingrained misogyny still present and still tolerated in modern society. She asks 'why is it “black humour” to sing about killing a white woman, but a horrible sin if the fictional victim is a black man?' (287), and points out that 'those men who believe in the brotherhood of

man do not seem to think it should include women' (8). The popularity of hip-hop, especially among the white community, brought with it a lyrical style where women are frequently degraded and 'with the development of gansta [sic] rap in the late Eighties, the wholesale rape, torture and killing of women became almost mandatory' (287). Violence towards women is a common theme in rap music and, as a former punk, Burchill is certainly justified in pointing out that 'a youth culture that finds domestic violence funny and cool is merely echoing the dominant and ultraconservative values of the Establishment' (288). The hypocrisy of such sexism angers her to the extent that she suggests, 'if you declare yourself an anti-racist, you can then practice misogyny with impunity' (9). When it comes to racism and sexism for her 'it makes no moral sense to laugh at and excuse one and to revile the other' (288).

She wittily argues it is an obviously homosexual activity and tendency for men to prefer to sit around getting drunk with blokes or watching half naked blokes chase a ball, than have sex with a woman. Burchill likes to call such men 'Jock Homos' and suggests that their tendency to talk a lot about how much they love the game only disguises 'a burning desire to bend, bugger and blow' (59). Yet these men act vehemently heterosexual because they 'don't have the guts to carry it through' (58). This sexual repression causes these men to 'end up hitting the bottle and women' (58) because of their 'tormented masculinity based on sexual confusion' (176). The violence of these men causes them to 'get sent to jail … where … it's acceptable to bend, blow and bugger to kingdom come' (177). Her suspicion of the motivation of armchair sporting enthusiasts is summed up in her belief that 'boxing is a sport where men beat up men, and football is a sport where men beat up women' (59).

Many of the sacred cows of celebrity are given the Burchill reality check. She calls Noel Coward 'a craven' and 'a misanthrope' (43), and describes him as conservative, royalist, elitist and a man who 'feared and loathed women – unless they were, of course, Queens' (44). When the media began to compare Oscar Wilde to Noel Coward, Burchill quickly saw red-commenting that 'Wilde fled the country over love, Coward for money … Wilde was a radical, Coward reactionary' (44). The continued adoration of Noel Coward is mirrored in 'Sir Elton John and St Gianni Versace [who] have come to epitomise the acceptable face of homosexuality … 'creative', rich, cosying up to royalty' (45).

At the death of Frank Sinatra, Burchill was equally scathing about the completely differing attitudes towards famous women: 'first you're hot, then you're troubled, then you're a Tragic Heroine; these are the Three Ages of Women' (53). She points out that for women like Liza Minnelli and Liz Taylor, the media obsess over their weight and drug addictions and many marriages, by contrast, 'no-one mentioned that Sinatra was once a beauty and at his death was grey, wrinkled and paunchy' (54). The celebration of male celebrity no matter how bad their behaviour, or even how bad their art, is compared to how 'a woman, from Piaf to Diana, only ever adds up to the sum of their wounds' (54), 'men's lives are always portrayed as triumphs; women's as failures' (54).

The cultural pressure for women to work hard at being beautiful is highly criticised by Burchill, who calls Cher 'a creature of a society that sees ageing in women as a perverse act of rebellion', and sees her as 'miserable, not because she is getting older, but because she refused to accept she was getting older and neglected her career to become a living, breathing Barbie doll' (54-5). When the pregnant Demi Moore posed naked on the cover of *Vanity Fair*, looking glamorous and covered in jewellery and make-up, Burchill fumed that this 'gave her lazier, less neurotic sisters yet one more jump to fall' (75). When Moore broke up with Bruce Willis, Burchill interpreted this as demonstrating that Moore was 'the logical conclusion of a culture that judges women on their appearance; she spent so much time on and

energy on her looks that her acting and her marriage – which presumably her hard work on her physical self was meant to secure – fell by the wayside' (75).

When the media expressed shock that both Bill Clinton and Bruce Willis would have affairs with plump women (when they had thin wives at home) Burchill declared, 'we are victims of the modern myth that any thin person is more attractive than any fat person' (75). Burchill likes seeing women gain weight, and the press frenzy over Kim Wilde becoming an overweight housewife prompted her to comment that 'those who write pieces about people losing their looks were never beauties themselves in the first place' (76).

One of the most sacred of dead celebrities, the murdered John Lennon, is deconstructed by Burchill, who often reminds readers that he 'went straight from speccy nerd to playground bully without even considering the option of becoming a sweet-natured, sentient human being' (124). When Lennon's face was used for Amnesty advertisements Burchill said 'in his actions, as opposed to his statements and his songs, Lennon exhibited largely selfishness and spite on his time on earth' (125). And then, when a series of documentaries held him up as a rags-to-riches hero she pointed out that he was a 'phoney … working class hero … the tosser was at art school in the early Fifties' (298) and he clearly had 'manicured roots' (299). She mentions his articulating racism and homophobia in calling manager Brian Epstein a “Queer Jew” and Yoko Ono his “Jap” (299).

As a working class woman who has spent her life honing her writing craft Burchill had little empathy for the flurry of idolising of Paula Yates when she died. She parallels her life with Yates', and notes that Yates 'expected to have an easy ride through life because she was blonde and fluffy' (282). Burchill has little time for anyone who doesn't bother to make an effort and her attitude to male privilege shows her belief in the dignity of hard work: 'It is not castrating feminism that now sees boys falling behind girls on every educational level, but rather the culmination of centuries of male supremacy, which taught them that, without trying, they will do better than their sisters at school and that the plum pickings of the job market will forever be reserved for them, solely because of the shape of their genitals' (36).

Burchill is quick in attacking hypocrisy of any kind, but especially any to do with violence. She sees the current trend of men 'unbottling' rage as particularly vile because 'they are treated as though they, not the woman they attacked, was actually the victim of the rage – as though it were a natural phenomenon, like a tornado, that buffeted them about beyond their control' (8). She finds equally distasteful the current predominance on television of shows about murder and rape, suggesting that 'death is so much a staple of home entertainment that even to question it comes across as radical and mad' (48). Turning the tables on the trend she asks the lovers of violent entertainment to 'imagine if birth was shown on TV as often as death is?' (48). And in typical Burchill in your face punk style anger she suggest that it is 'damn obvious why the Catholic Church is against abortion; too many of them, and there'll be no more unwanted, vulnerable children to rape' (184).

The practice of watching live comedy and comedy films is described by her as being akin to hiring a prostitute, in that if you have to pay for laughs you are clearly leading a very sad and lonely life. The infamous Bridget Jones, who before cinematic glory was a newspaper column, also falls under Burchill's scrutiny. She finds appalling the whole notion of the pathetic single woman pining after some libertine egomaniac and obsessing over her diet and figure. Burchill is quick to boast that she is fat and happy, that she has never spent longer than a week single and currently dates younger men, and she also does not hold back from discussing her lesbian relationships and earlier marriages. As a former

punk it is not surprising that she loathes hippies, arguing that the long hair and back to nature (barefoot and pregnant) ethos was exactly what feminists wanted to leave behind when they bobbed their hair and entered the workforce in the 1960s.

A self-declared 'stroppy woman' who sees happiness as a choice, Julie Burchill is at times arrogant and smug, but she is never dull. Her columns are fun and empowering, reminding us all to speak what we think truth is and stand up against our rights being trampled.

You can read the archives of Burchill's articles for *The Guardian* at:
http://www.guardian.co.uk/Columnists/Column/0,5673,1094420,00.html

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Propagating Culture

Green Pens: A Collection of Garden Writing. **Katie Holmes, Susan K. Martin, and Kylie Mirmohamadi, eds. Melbourne: The Miegunyah Press, 2004.**

By Marian Quartly

The editors begin their introduction to this volume with an observation from Elizabeth von Armin's *The Solitary Summer* (1899):

> I know of no objects of love that give such substantial and unfailing returns as books and a garden (p.2).

And the book presents itself as an object of love. Miegunyah Press have exceeded their normally high standards of publishing to produce a startlingly elegant volume. Kate Mitchell Design have drawn on William Morris's floral wallpaper patterns for the cover, the endplates and the chapter heads, all in a range of olive to eucalyptus greens, to stunning effect. The editors have chosen documentary extracts – 'cuttings', they say – from a great array of primary sources: diaries and letters, journals and newspapers, novels and autobiographies. Each is presented with a few words of contextual comment, sometimes affectionate, sometimes instructive, just enough to allow it to bloom in its own right.

And yes, there is much play with the parallels between words and flowers. The American writer and gardener Michael Pollan is cited as observing that: 'Writing and gardening, these two ways of rendering the world in rows, have a great deal in common.' The extracts are arranged in chapters ('flowerbeds') designed to exhibit the varieties of garden history. 'Settling' sketches a chronology of gardening in Australia, from survival tactics in the earliest years to battles to grow roses in outback Queensland. 'Dreaming' is about the desire for a garden, or rather about the different kinds of horticultural longings that Australians have suffered and enjoyed. Other chapters look at the work of gardening, the gendering of gardeners, the place of gardens in the history of childhood, the moral burdens placed upon gardeners and gardening, horticultural nationalism and 'native' gardens, and gardens within schools and institutions.

> While these massed plantings satisfy the mind's eye, some of the chapter groupings seem less logical, and this reader at least suffered an editorial itch to replant individual items. Take for example the 1950s advertisement for Gay Sprinklers, who urged their readers: 'Don't be a Hose-Holder: Spray the Gay Way.' The editors note judiciously that Garden watering seemed to bring out the sexual innuendo in advertisers – it is hard to believe that the copywriter … was not aware of the double meaning that 'gay' had carried since the 1890s (p.67).

This is currently placed in the rather amorphous chapter 'Gardening Life'; surely it would find more suitable soil in 'Sex in the Garden'?

Readers will discover fascinating themes running through the volume regardless of chapter headings. There is much to be learnt here about the creating of Australian gardens (at least since c1788), and about the public and private uses to which they have been put. For the committed gardener the prime pleasure will probably be in vicariously sharing the experience of their forebears, their luxurious

successes and arid failures. The environmentally concerned can find writ small a history of land use, from careless exploitation to the conservation of a threatened resource. Feminists will be intrigued to discover just how committed the suffragists were to the ideal of the womanly woman in a decorative garden setting, and how readily they translated this ideal into a vision of gendered citizenship. Those involved with education will enjoy the diversity of the national benefits believed to flow from gardening in schools: readiness to labour, self-discipline, botanical knowledge, love of nature, blossoming imagination – sound bodies and sound minds.

Those interested in the history of the Australian garden as such can trace its development from attempts to recreate an English garden with lawns and flowering borders of pansies and mignonette, to the practical 'back yard' with concrete and fruit trees and a hills-hoist, to the exclusivist all-native lawnless expanse of native grasses and prostrate bottlebrush, to, most recently, a more 'multicultural' vision discovered by the editors in the author and gardener John Cameron:

> My perspectives on the many introduced species in the garden began to change as I came to understand a little of their history. Implicitly I regarded them all as undifferentiated aliens, massed at the border and ready to overwhelm the defenceless natives. Now I know that there are invasive and non-invasive varieties, and some non-natives attract native birds… I wonder, is there some type of plant multiculturalism in which we can celebrate a history and diversity of plant types, regardless of their origin? (p.140)

Not the least of this book's pleasures is the way in which the history of Australia's gardens comes to stand as a metaphor for the history of the nation.

And then of course the book can be enjoyed as gardens are often enjoyed – by a random wandering, an unplanned discovery of individual delights. Different readers will discover different favourites. Mine are driven by a gossipy interest in the lives of the famous; to discover for instance Judith Wright in a 'dark mood' because the pony got into her garden and walked down all the carrots and ate all the beans and smashed all the tomatoes and pumpkins but luckily missed the seed-boxes of cabbages and cauliflowers and the new row of peas (p.75).

Then there is Sunday Reed writing to Joy Hester in 1951:

> What if you were to take a little cottage somewhere near us and from there I thought of a nursery and if Heide could be a 'mother' garden and share herself with you (p.38).

One suspects that the mothering instinct extended beyond the garden.

Finally there is the letter which Jean Galbraith, a prolific gardener and author of garden books, wrote in 1939 to Anton Vroland on the death of his wife Anna. Anna Vroland had long worked tirelessly and very privately for those unable to help themselves.

> The fragrance and beauty of your garden is blooming in ours – almost everything she gave us has grown and bloomed – a kind of symbol of her work among children – growing, increasing and dropping seed, even in ground she did not know…(p.123)

The editors of *Green Pens* have a great eye for fertile metaphor.

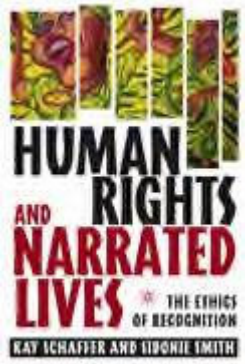
Marian Quartly has taught at Monash since 1980. She is currently editing the recently founded *History Australia*, the journal of the Australian Historical Association. Her publications include the jointly authored feminist history of Australia, *Creating a Nation,* originally published by McPhee Gribble/Penguin in 1994, and about to be reissued by the API Network.

The Personal Really Is Political

***Human Rights and Narrated Lives: The Ethics of Recognition*. Sidonie Smith and Kay Schaffer. Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.**

By Kylie Cardell

Life narrative is ubiquitous, and in the realm of human rights activism, it is crucial. *Human Rights and Narrated Lives: The Ethics of Recognition* is a timely and important contribution by Kay Schaffer and Sidonie Smith to contemporary debates on testimony, storytelling and the place of the autobiographical. Schaffer and Smith emphasize that, life narrative is a decidedly Western phenomenon, albeit one that has achieved 'an international currency.' (24) The rise of life narrative as a global practice, and the appetite for its products, produces a channel for oppressed and marginalised peoples to engage large audiences, and therefore possible activists, to their cause. Life narrative is intimately associated with the emergence in the West of 'human rights as the privileged mode of addressing human suffering.' (2) The often problematic and complex link between the two, and their contemporary circulation, production and reception, are the subject of this book.



Two earlier critically important essays – 'Conjunctions: Life Narratives in the Field of Human Rights,' originally published in *Biography* and 'The Venues of Storytelling,' originally published in *Life Writing* - are reproduced here. As the first two chapters, they provide a sophisticated and wide-ranging theoretical and contextual framework for the case studies to follow. In 'Conjunctions,' Schaffer and Smith draw attention to the complex interlocking of the personal and the political within the commodity of life narrative. They draw attention to an uneasy alliance between the needs of oppressed and marginalised people to the hunger in the West for narratives 'telling of individualist triumph over adversity' (25). They interrogate the historical and social conditions that have produced a privileging of the personal in contemporary life and that contribute to the emergence of a discourse of human rights through life narrative. This interest in the contemporary flows of personal narratives and human rights is extended in 'The Venues of Storytelling' to include an analysis of the locations other than the printed domain that increasingly participate in the dissemination of the testimonial and that frame diverse acts of witnessing. The venues they define include: fact-finding in the field, human rights commissions reports; collections of testimonies; stories in the media, and various others. These are the multiple and diverse locations of human rights discourse today.

Impelled by the need to map a global culture in life narrative production, with an attendant diversity of venues and methods for testimonial expression, Schaffer and Smith contextualise their historical political approach to life narrative and human rights activism with 'five sites that enable us to consider the conflicted and indeterminate ways in which storytelling connects to human rights.' (9)

In 'Truth, Reconciliation, and the Traumatic Past of South Africa', Schaffer and Smith pay attention to 'the diverse forms of witnessing to life' that 'recorded, spurred and sustained the Struggle' (60) both during and after apartheid South Africa. Paying particular attention to the complicated processes of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), Schaffer and Smith tread carefully, and ultimately optimistically, through the uneven moral and ethical ground that defined this mass testimonial process, and its ambivalent after-effects.

'Indigenous Human Rights in Australia: Who Speaks for the Stolen Generations?' examines the diverse campaigns that fuelled discussions of Indigenous rights and abuse in Australia. Examining in particular detail the use of Indigenous methods of storytelling, Schaffer and Smith draw attention to the ways such non-traditional, non-Western methods produce an 'ethics of intersubjective exchange' (121) that challenges Eurocentric assumptions of the normal and the universal.

'Belated Narrating: 'Grandmothers' Telling Stories of Forced Sexual Slavery During World War II' deals with the effects of what Schaffer and Smith call the 'gendered shame' (127) that surrounded the 50-year silence of forced Korean 'comfort women' during World War Two. While examining the specifics of the situation, and the historical and cultural shifts that ended the silence, they also note the difficulties facing subjects whose experiences talk to an 'ur-story' of suffering. Faced with a 'script' of expectations, human rights campaigns often tread a fine line between constraint and validation for subjects in the location between commodity and testimony.

'Life Sentences: Narrated Lives and Prisoner Rights in the United States' examines a rights scenario typically not often attended to by the world's leaders on the international human rights stage, trial of rights abuses 'at home.' Investigating the thorny issue of 'prison rights,' Schaffer and Smith discuss what happens to human rights when the moral and ethical boundaries are not clearly discernible and not explainable as elsewhere (the product of cultural anomalies). The kind of rhetoric implemented in prison narrative throws into relief the moral relativism and rights narcissism of 'contemporary America's psychic economy of fear' (186).

'Post-Tiananmen Narratives and the New China' examines the continuing pressure China exerts on the circulation of narratives of the 1989 Tiananmen Square Massacre. Despite international attention and condemnation, Chinese authorities maintain a hardline stance and continue to repress civil and political liberties. Counteracting this authoritative stance, resistance is perpetrated at the micro-level, in particular, campaigners for civil rights operate via the Internet and within local, underground spheres. The West's fascination with China also implements trans global pressures; literature that contradicts the homogeneous, unified facade emerges to an eager audience in the West.

Crucially, the heart of this work rests on an interpretation of storytelling. Though Schaffer and Smith remain optimistic with regards to the multiple and diverse ways in which oppressed subjects find means to garner recognition and representation, I found the notion of storytelling itself under-negotiated in an explicit sense. However, the focus of the book is firmly on the material, on the campaigns and scenarios of witnessing to resistance. The benefits of understanding testimonial narrative as story; the fluidity, multiplicity and elasticity granted to diverse subjects in the articulation of their experience, the possibility of appeal to wide-spread audiences, lies in uneasy counterbalance to the political and legal-juridical frameworks that govern administrations of reparation, atonement and change.

In a context of human rights campaigns, life narrative is a commodity, a necessary and powerful component of testimonial witnessing. That risks remain for subjects whose narratives don't make good story, that don't appeal or comply with popular conceptions of trauma and oppression, is implicit in the process. Indeed, as personal storytelling becomes increasingly central to human rights campaigns, activism and progress, it becomes increasingly apparent that not all stories are acceptable from all storytellers. While public concern may actually drive important transformations, its absence may all too

often succeed in obscuring other less glamorous, less appealing or less popular causes. Life narratives, and human rights campaigners, need to appeal to audiences, whether through affirming prejudices and a sense of righteousness, or as an empathic impulse of identification. The risk, of course, is that the real need behind the articulation of a testimonial life narrative may become domesticated, diminished; just one more dramatic narrative on the bookshop shelf. Suffering becomes a commodity, narratives of resistance become domesticated as tales of endurance against the odds and personal testimony becomes a good story, not a call to action or impulse to change.

Ultimately, Schaffer and Smith remind us that global flows do not necessarily produce global understandings, that contexts must be retained, that human rights, though a global concern, remain fractured, divergent and specific within differing cultural moral and ethical boundaries. Beneath the massive operations of a discourse of human rights, Schaffer and Smith find micro-resistances and unexpected freedoms, mobilisations of culture and tradition that celebrate unexpected flights, organic transformations. 'This book,' Schaffer and Smith affirm, 'is a testimony to the efficacy of stories' (233). *Human Rights and Narrated Lives* is an optimistic and powerful work, one that will no doubt be central in the field for years to come.

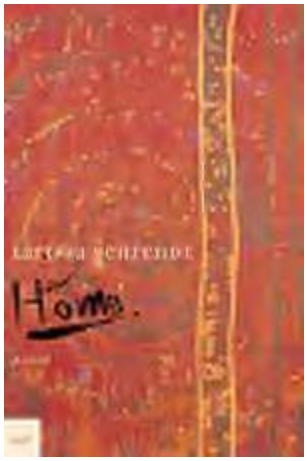
Kylie Cardell is a PhD candidate at The University of Queensland and is currently completing her thesis on contemporary uses of the diary. She is also the convenor of the Life Narrative Reading Group.

Where Grief Had Begun to Bleed Generations Ago.

Review of *Home*. Larissa Behrendt, Brisbane, University of Queensland Press, 2004.

By Frances Cruickshank

Larissa Behrendt's debut novel is a rich blend of history, fiction, and autobiography that sometimes falls short of lucidity but nevertheless casts a powerful spell on the reader. Home is the story of an Aboriginal family torn apart by government policy and deep-rooted prejudice, who struggle through three generations to recover that sense of identity, unity, and place which constitutes the elusive idea of 'home.' Set in the vivid landscapes of urban and rural New South Wales, the novel evokes the spare beauty of the Australian bush, haunted by a ghostly history of rupture, displacement and loss. Yet for all its grim truths, the story is ultimately hopeful, and its centre of gravity is the indomitable faith and warmth of its very human characters.



The novel is bracketed by the reflections of Candice Brecht, a successful and cosmopolitan landrights lawyer who, though proud of her heritage, keeps an academic distance between herself and her indigenous roots. Candy travels with her father back to the place where her Eualeyai grandmother Garibooli was taken by the government in 1918, and she sees for the first time the origins of her dislocated family. The narrative shifts back in time to follow Garibooli as she is renamed, relocated, and cut off from all she has known by a policy which is designed to give her 'a better life.' The wrenching contrasts between Garibooli's settled happiness with her family and her miserable drudgery as a housemaid in a wealthy white family are truly moving, and Behrendt's picture of the appalling loneliness and vulnerability of a stolen child is what makes the book worth reading.

Garibooli, now called Elizabeth, no sooner begins to adjust to her new environment than the pleasing attentions of her white boss (a Mr Howard) become a nightmarish catastrophe of rape, shame, and, nine months later, another stolen child. Elizabeth's grief at the loss of this child is only assuaged by her friendship with Grigor Brecht, a young German communist, whose proposal of marriage seems to offer hope of rescue. Elizabeth and Grigor's marriage is happy enough, but when she dies prematurely, Grigor's increasing dysfunction leads to their children being placed in an orphanage. The story then follows Patricia, the eldest daughter, as she strives to keep their fragmenting family together, dreaming of a home in which they can find peace and unity at last. These dreams are shattered by her siblings' jealousy and betrayal, and the cycle of hope and loss begins again. With the next generation, the sense of Aboriginal identity is stronger and prouder, but the success of Candy and her brother is underwritten by years of bitter struggle; a triumph marked by tragedy. By the end of the book, Candy's self-assurance is somewhat troubled, but at the same time she is closer to her roots, more connected with the chequered history of her home.

Behrendt's writing is refreshingly unromantic. Though the book is emotionally stirring, there is no indulgence of sentiment for the victims nor demonisation of the instruments of tragedy. Rather, each of the multiplicity of characters is drawn with a kind of careful restraint that makes the novel a poignant and compelling human history. The narrative bristles with Behrendt's own knowledge of history and culture (both Indigenous and European), and English, French, Irish, Chinese, Italian, German, and Aboriginal characters act and interact not as shallow political constructs but as genuine individuals with

complex motivations. As the narrative broadens to embrace more characters, Behrendt tends to rely on pop psychology brushstrokes rather than detailed portraiture, but the central characters of Elizabeth, Patricia, and Candy are knowingly and tenderly drawn. Their experiences may be typical, but they are not mere types.

Indeed the real strength of the book is its rejection of such simple binaries as black and white, then and now. Through the lives of the characters, Australian culture is reconstructed not as politically diachrome, but as a spectrum of colours which interweave across time and space, and which bleed (sometimes fatally) into each other. Likewise there is no equatorial line between past and present; the threads of the past are inextricably bound into the tapestry of the present, and no simple unravelling can solve the problems with which Australian history is knotted. The kidnapping of a twelve-year-old girl almost a century ago has ramifications which spread wider and wider across continents, decades, cultures, and classes as the story unfolds, and many lives are affected, in diverse and sometimes horrifying ways, by these ripples of historical connection.

If the novel has a weakness, it is the tendency for its theoretical and ideological bones to poke through the flesh of the fiction. Behrendt is not always content to let the power of images carry the message, and she frequently betrays her legal-historical background when imaginative reflection is sacrificed to bare statement and undisguised campaigning. Particularly in the stories of the later characters, the narrative rushes through emotional incident and development so quickly that these parts of the novel read more like a precis than a fully clothed story. Yet this unseemly haste is a reflection of the urgency and currency of the indigenous cause; much must be forgiven of a badly told story when it is a story that needs so badly to be told.

However, to call this a badly told story would be a gross misjudgment. Despite some weaknesses of literary style, Home is a confronting and convincing debut that handles sensitive issues with insight and grace. Behrendt's blending of truth and fiction (sometimes awkward but always challenging) ultimately points to the complexity of contemporary Australian culture. What the novel finally brings home is the fact that history is made of the interweaving and patterning of individual stories, and the political is always deeply and expensively personal.

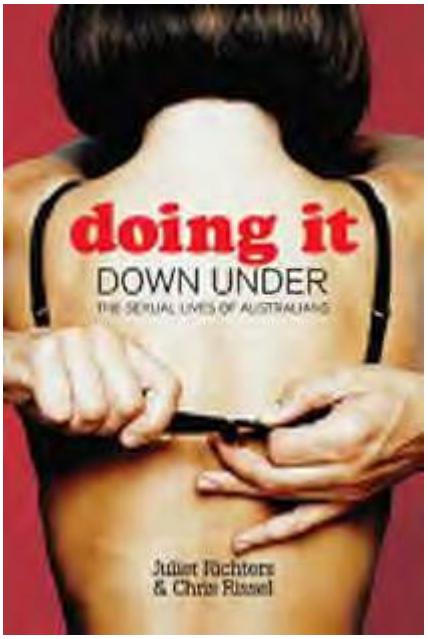
Frances Cruickshank is a postgraduate student in the School of English, Media Studies and Art History at the University of Queensland.

Correcting Some Guesstimates

Review of Juliet Richters and Chris Rissel, *Doing It Down Under: The Sexual Lives of Australians.* Allen and Unwin, Crows Nest, 2005.

By Kirsten McLean

Doing It Down Under is based on the extensive 'Sex in Australia' research reported in the *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health* in 2003. As the 'largest sex survey ever done in Australia' (ix), and with an impressive sample size of 19,307 randomly-sampled men and women, this research is an excellent contribution towards understandings of sexual practices and sexual health in twenty-first century Australia.



In 18 small and easily digestible chapters, the book covers the basics of what people do sexually and how often, sexual attitudes, masturbation, using sex toys and pornography, cheating and infidelity, sexual identities, pregnancy and contraception, sexual difficulties, paying for sex, sexually transmitted infections, and in a sobering chapter, sexual assault. A summary chapter, called 'Sex in Australia' provides a glimpse of the major findings of each chapter, and is great for those wanting an overview of the research, or to see the basic findings of the research in a hurry. I used this chapter at the start of the semester to 'test' students in my undergraduate course on sexuality about their knowledge of sexual attitudes and practices in Australia. It provided a fun-filled session where my students 'guesstimated' that 100% of men would have masturbated in the past 12 months (it is in fact a little lower than that), that very few women had watched an X-rated film in the past year (it is much higher than they expected) and that men and women were using condoms regularly (their use is much less regular than health organisations and governments would like). When I read the actual statistics from this chapter to my class, the students were very surprised by a large number of them, indicating, perhaps, that some people still base their beliefs about sexuality on misconceptions and misleading stereotypes.

However *Doing It Down Under* is not just a book full of statistics; it is an immensely practical book that discusses sexual issues in an uncomplicated but frank and informative way. This discussion is interspersed with clear and concise charts of the statistics, which are fully explained and interpreted for the everyday reader. There are also text boxes throughout each chapter highlighting the key points being made. Age and gender differences occurring in the data are explained by looking more closely at the socio-historical changes in attitudes to sexuality and sexual behaviour over the last 50 years or so. But the best part of the findings, perhaps, is the inclusion of composite case studies, giving typical 'real life' examples of people's sexual behaviours or attitudes. These case studies are written in such as way as to make both ordinary and extraordinary sexual experiences seem equally unique and positive. For example, we get a detailed insight into Joachim's fantasies and experiences of S/M sex (45), then we meet Michelle who is struggling with her sexual identity (56). Then we journey through 36-year-old Margaret's attempts to get pregnant (75). Richters and Rissel also include two quizzes about sexual attitudes and sexual health for the reader to do. Like a pop quiz in a women's magazine, these provide feedback on the reader's own sexual attitudes and knowledge about sexual health – although unlike the quizzes in women's magazines, the reader gets sensible and practical feedback about their scores. All

these things combine to provide a text that gives an excellent account of the diversity and complexity of human sexuality as it is currently understood and experienced in this country.

Towards the end of the book, Richters and Rissel provide a strong list of references and further reading – a good resource for those working in the field of sexuality, and for everyday people wanting more information on particular topics. A very extensive index is also provided, as is a copy of the questionnaire used to collect the data, which is a useful addition for those interested in the methodological aspects of sexuality research.

A key feature of *Doing It Down Under* is its unbiased, non-judgemental style. Richters and Rissel discuss gay and lesbian issues alongside heterosexual issues, kinky sex alongside 'vanilla' sex (which they define as 'vaginal intercourse), hand jobs (masturbation) and blow jobs (oral sex)' (101). All types of sexuality are presented respectfully, and on the whole, positively. The authors give brief interpretations of the reasons for certain findings, but without judgement. My one concern, however, was the discussion about gay and bisexual men's sexual behaviour throughout the book. It is noted that gay and bisexual men have a greater number of sexual partners, fewer regular relationships and greater incidences of sexually transmitted infections. While not the authors' intentions to judge these findings, they could in fact be interpreted by others to make negative judgements about gay and bisexual men in the future.

Nevertheless, the information presented in *Doing It Down Under* challenges many common stereotypes and misconceptions about sexuality: for example, that all men who have sex with other men have anal sex (not so) or that all people who practice S/M are sadistic or masochistic (again, not necessarily). They even go so far as to say that certain ideas about sexuality are just plain 'silly'. About the belief that men think about sex every 8 seconds, they say: 'This seems to be a statistic invented by a bored journalist in a bar' (15).

The beauty of *Doing It Down Under* is that it does not assume readers will have academic knowledge about sexuality, so the authors define and clearly explain everything. They argue in the Preface: 'We have tried to write this book in a simple style to make the information accessible to most people. It is likely to be of particular interest to professionals such as nurses, counsellors, social workers, health educators, school teachers, doctors, sociologists or researchers, but also to everyone who has an interest in the way we live' (x). Indeed, the book's simplicity and style make it perfect for a wide variety of audiences, from the everyday person wanting information about sexuality – and something with which to compare their own sexual life, perhaps – to the more academic audience who can use these statistics in a variety of ways – to educate, to challenge, or to empower.

It is not often that new Australian books about sexual health and sexual behaviour hit the shelves. As a lecturer and researcher in sexuality I held out much anticipation for this book, both for my teaching and my own research. I was not disappointed - a book like *Doing It Down Under* is long overdue in this country. While people in other Western nations have been privy to the intimacies of their counterparts for over 50 years (in the US, Kinsey's large scale studies were published in the 1940s and 1950s), Australians have been less enthusiastic about taking up the challenge to conduct large scale sexuality research and publish it for a wider audience.

Doing It Down Under is a very good example of how to write up complex research results for a general audience. Its clear, logical style, the inclusion of real-life examples, and the presentation of easy-to-

read charts and tables make this book a very worthwhile resource. If you are looking for an instruction manual about how to 'do' sex, then the authors advise that one can only learn so much from reading about sex: they state that 'Sex, like cooking or driving, needs to be learnt. Books can help but real-life experience is essential' (6). If, however, you are looking for a straightforward, matter-of-fact discussion about various facets of sexual life, then this is a book worth considering.

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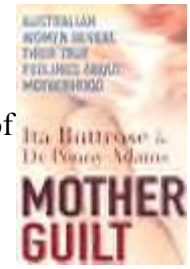
True Guilt

Review of *Motherguilt: Australian Women Reveal Their True Feelings About Motherhood* by Ita Buttrose and Dr Penny Adams, Viking/Penguin, 2005.

By Jo Lindsay

This book affirms that the 'guilt' discourse is dominant in the way contemporary women are able to talk publicly about the consuming and complex tasks involved in mothering. *Motherguilt* is a popular book aimed at a mainstream market. The book reads like a selection of twenty popular women's magazine articles on the topic of maternal guilt. It is written in a lively and often engaging way and is peppered with real life experiences of the rich and famous alongside the confessions of other Australian women.



The guilt that mothers feel is the central theme of the book and the authors argue this form of guilt is so specific it deserves its own name, 'motherguilt'. At times there is an excessive edge to the argument and motherguilt is viewed as a disease to be cured. Buttrose and Adams claim that guilt is 'in plague proportions', that there is 'an epidemic of guilt' – and the women in the text largely support this argument as they recount myriad examples of their actions and the guilt they have suffered because of these. The book is largely an exploration of the difficulties involved in mothering and, although the blurb claims there is also a 'joyous celebration of the magic of motherhood', the theme of difficulty dominates the text. The chapters explore an enormous range of themes including pregnancy and childbirth, breastfeeding, paid work and childcare, stay-at-home mothers, lesbian parenting, competitiveness between mothers, non-Anglo cultural backgrounds, dealing with teenagers, adopting out a child, sex, divorce, step-mothering, the death of a child and the different circumstances of fathers. The final chapter argues that 'motherguilt has no place in the twenty-first century' and that society's unrealistic expectations of mothers should be challenged. Buttrose and Adams then offer eight tips for eliminating guilt from a mother's life and 'curing motherguilt'. A change in mindset is required so women can view themselves as people rather than just mothers.

From an academic point of view (and maybe it's unfair to judge it in this way) the book is frustrating. It is a polemical piece based largely on the experiences, views and prejudices of the authors rather than a careful consideration of the ideas they draw upon. Throughout the book numerous pieces of research are used to support the arguments, but these are often cited poorly or not at all. A range of experiences are said to have a 'scientific basis' or be supported by 'medical evidence' or 'sociological' studies. The cause of motherguilt is laid firmly at the feet of 'women's liberation' (the term favoured by a dominant strand in early second wave feminism in the 1960s):

> It is the authors' belief that Motherguilt, as we know and understand it in the twenty-first century, can be deliberately attributed to the gaining of 'choices' at the time of Women's Liberation …. women have had to shoulder the burden of guilt that comes from trying to overcome their natural nurturing instincts and combine conflicting roles (4).

Instead of a celebration of women's achievements since the 1970s there is an implication that women's suffering now is due to the role conflict they themselves have created. Strategies for moving forward and the implications of the examples discussed in the book are contradictory – on the one hand there is a solid appreciation that mothering work is invisible and undervalued and that feminism needs to go further so that men contribute substantially more to parenting and domestic labour. But on the other hand, there is admiration for women choosing to leave the labour market and be more available to their

children. Wendy Harmer 'Queen of Breakfast radio' quit work to become a stay-at-home mum. Buttrose and Adams write: 'It has to be every working mother's dream come true – the chance to find out if she would be happier away from the workplace, swapping full-time work for full-time motherhood' (122).

In some parts of the book the authors go against their intended aims and do less to assuage guilt than enhance it. For example, childhood obesity and children eating 'themselves to death' is linked to mothers being in the workplace and spending less time with their children (106). Contemporary mothers are also blamed for the 'hurried child' syndrome and the increasing numbers of stressed children turning up at medical practices. The authors go further and claim that mothers are ruining the 'golden age' of childhood:

> Children cross adult boundaries long before they are ready and know too much too soon through exposure to television, movies and the Internet. Their innocence is disappearing as quickly as their childhood years. And on top of this they have to cope with competitive mothers who use them to score points over other mothers (163).

Penny Adams is a general practitioner and provides medical opinion throughout the book. She defends obstetricians and appears to blame women for the rising caesarean rate:

> Obstetricians are often wrongly accused of encouraging Caesars so 'they don't have to get up at night'. The truth is that doctors are incredibly and exhaustingly used to getting up at night. The real impetus behind the increasing Caesar rate comes from women who are either fearful of vaginal delivery … or who simply feel they need to plan the baby's arrival because of work and social commitments (28).

In some parts of the book there is an acknowledgement that women occupy different social locations – lesbian women and women from non-English speaking backgrounds are examples. However, the book shows little appreciation of material divisions between women or economic inequality. Many of the women's voices in the text are those of upper-class and privileged women. Many are famous women including surgeons, businessmen, politicians (such as Jackie Kelly) or media personalities including Jean Kittson, Carla Zampatti and Wendy Harmer. The options and choices available to these women have an other-worldly flavour, indeed they belong in magazines about the rich and famous instead of being attainable strategies for the majority of Australian women.

For example, Ita Buttrose says: 'I would never have been able to carry out my high-powered job without the enlightened thinking of Kerry Packer, the boss of Australian consolidated press' since 'as I began to climb the corporate ladder Kerry adjusted my package to include firstly a live-in mothercraft nurse when Ben was born, and then, as he grew older, a live-in housekeeper. When women are negotiating their packages they should forget about the car and ask for a nanny' (107).

Clearly, Ita Buttrose and Penny Adams feel that mothering should be appreciated more and women should not have to feel guilty about putting their needs before others. But the long descriptions of the difficulties involved in motherhood take up most of the book and undercut the pleasures involved in mothering.

Is it really a service to women to make motherhood synonymous with guilt; to raise the guilt discourse to fever pitch by using various 'experts' as this book does? Jackie Kelly, former Federal Minister for Sport and Tourism is quoted as saying: 'Motherhood is just another name for guilt' (92). Many of the

comments chosen paint an unnecessarily grim picture. For example the following one closes chapter one. After a difficult labour, Polly sobbed into the phone to her own mother:

> Mum, I've just had the most beautiful little baby girl, and I don't know why, but I feel so guilty. Her mother simply replied, 'Welcome to motherhood (32).

In much of the book a very negative lens is used to view current social arrangements:

> Many of these working mothers are wondering if this is as good as it gets, with 20 per cent of them claiming that parenting is more work than pleasure – compared with 15 per cent of fathers (102).

The source of this research is not cited, but we can still ask about the vast majority of those working women, the other 80 percent. Presumably they said that parenting is more pleasure than work.

Ultimately, I would argue that the guilt discourse doesn't move mothers forward it keeps us stuck. We are left with old fashioned ways of understanding the social world in terms of roles and conflict. Individual women are pushed into a cycle of pessimism about their chances of a satisfying motherhood. In addition to the 'positive action steps' advocated by Buttrose and Adams such as 'enjoy saying no' and 'enjoy time with your children', we need policy changes – less discrimination in the workplace, decent childcare and good maternity leave provisions. We also need political change so that men finally engage in parenting in more committed ways. But most importantly we need to remember women's ongoing achievements as mothers and workers and understand that 'guilt' is only a small part of the picture.

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