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“HHH#1” - Fiona Foley

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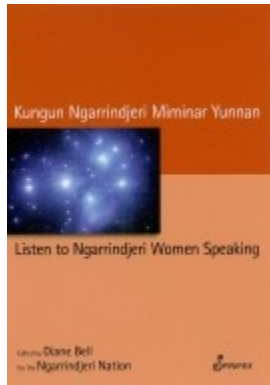
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Listening to the Land and the Stories of the Women

Kungun Ngarrindjeri miminar Yunnan - Listen to Ngarrindjeri Women Speaking, Edited by Diane Bell for the Ngarrindjeri Nation. Susan Hawthorne and Suzanne Bellamy - Unsettling the Land, Melbourne: Spinifex Press, 2008.

By Cathie Dunsfor



Spinifex Press has always been a leader in publishing the voices of Indigenous women and issues surrounding our stories and our lands. In these two books recently launched by Spinifex Press, a wealth of knowledge, struggle and celebration of survival is reflected in the vast project undertaken by Diane Bell and the Ngarrindjeri miminar [women] to document Ngarrindjeri history and stories, and in the poetry of Susan Hawthorne and art of Suzanne Bellamy in reflecting on the plight of the land in drought-afflicted times.

The connexions between these books may not at first seem clear to some readers, but they each tell stories about women and the land and they each document the importance of sustainable land to the survival of us as a species. Susan Hawthorne talks about the ‘unsettling of the land’ by the removal of the ‘seasons and the birds’; in effect, the influence of man's work in affecting global climate change and altering the seasons which has an effect on every living species. This crisis echoes the painful stories of the Ngarrindjeri miminar in recalling the stolen generations of babies that were ripped away from them by the Australian Government in a desperate attempt to obliterate and dissolve their Ngarrindjeri identities, alongside those of other Aboriginal peoples. Both books are intense collaborations that reflect the many decades of work that has gone before their births, and both are electrifying reading in their own right.

One of the most fascinating features of the Ngarrindjeri book is the methodology and process by which it came about. I spoke at the International Feminist Bookfair in 1994 about the need for editors and publishers to address the issues of oral storytelling and working with Indigenous cultures in different ways and to work with the writers and storytellers rather than dictating an academic or publishing style to them. I have since spoken at the Frankfurt and Istanbul Bookfairs on similar themes and in a recent book tour of Canada from which the Talkstory text emerged (see: www.apwn.net for further details and to download this text). So it is especially gratifying for me to see Diane Bell working so collaboratively with the Ngarrindjeri miminar during this project, as indeed Zohl de Ishtar has also done in her work in recording Pacific women's stories in *Daughters of the Pacific*, and Aboriginal Women's stories in her latest text. It should come as no surprise to find that, yet again, Spinifex Press is the publisher that nurtured these projects. Very few publishers globally would be capable of encouraging, honouring and publishing such vast collaborative projects that truly reflect the ability of Pakeha or non-Indigenous academics and writers to work so closely with Indigenous women, honouring their cultures and their own ways of working in the process.

Reading these stories, you really feel as if you are around the fire, listening to the oral stories as they unfold, in the manner that they were originally expressed. This is no small feat. The process of working on the book is constantly examined and negotiated, and is as fascinating as the stories themselves. The book not only brings forward the stories and encourages them from the miminar, but it also delineates the vast journey of trust and growing awareness undertaken by the cultural groups involved and, in so doing, lays out a possible blueprint for other academics, writers, editors and publishers to follow when contemplating such vital cross-cultural research as this.

The stories themselves are intense, with a wide range of material and emotions covered. They touch us in ways we might never have imagined before entering the book. The struggle and time it has taken to commit these stories to paper in a way that still honours the oral process by which they were and are still shared is reflected on every page. The design of the book and every single word have been collaboratively produced between the Narrindjeri miminar and other kringkarar [Pakeha/non-Indigenous] women working on the project. If you have never been involved in working on such a text, it would be hard to conceive of the time this takes and the sheer satisfaction of working in such a collaborative way, where all voices need to be heard before the final text and its style and presentation is decided. But, to the delight of the reader, this process is delineated in depth within the book, adding to its appeal and helping to set a pattern for future work by others.

The Narrindjeri miminar talk about racism and genocide that is still happening for them and their people. Yes, they do use the word 'Genocide' and it is appropriate. Maori politician Tariana Turia justified her use of the terms holocaust and genocide in relation to the systematic killing of Maori during the Taranaki Land Wars in a session in the New Zealand Parliament. Many people supported her words. Others were outraged. I talked about the holocaust and genocide in relation to the constant nuclear testing in the Pacific and the toll this had taken on the Maohi people in Manawa Toa: Heart Warrior. This was questioned on a book tour of Germany. I'd already had to argue it past my German-Jewish publisher, Antje Landshoff Ellermann. On the German Book Tour, I quoted Tariana Turia's words in parliament and talked further about the context. Many agreed. Some remained in denial. The systematic genocide of Aboriginal people, stealing babies from their mothers, expunging languages and cultures that are some of the most ancient on this planet, cannot be argued. It happened. Unless you want to join the ranks of Holocaust Deniers. Yet this word was picked out of this book and questioned by a Pakeha reader, so I knew that, yet again, the issue needed to be addressed in this review.

All the more reason that the Ngarrindjeri women do speak out so strongly and powerfully and passionately in this book, the eloquent and much awaited Apology To Australia's Indigenous Peoples from Kevin Rudd, the Australian Prime Minister (printed in the back of the book) notwithstanding. Like many others, I am waiting to see what Real Action will follow this Apology. Will the government and people of Australia be willing to fork out the millions and millions of dollars for the return of traditional land that has taken place in Aotearoa/New Zealand the past few decades and is still taking place? Will the words be endorsed by significant action and reparation? Will the government be willing to support the kind of solid research and stories that Dianne Bell and the Njarrindjeri women and Spinifex Press have collaborated to produce here, by their actions? Time will tell. This significant book and the process to achieve it, gives us huge hope for the future of cultural respect and sharing in Australia.

You will be deeply moved by the voices of the aunties and the powerful struggles and beautiful words of their stories. None of these stories should be reproduced here in this review. It takes the voices of the miminar themselves to tell their stories with such grace and power. Too many times their words have been stolen by others, as their children were stolen. Instead, I urge all readers to buy this book for your families, use it as a model to discuss ways that all Australians can learn and grow and discover more about the culture that defines their land. You will be enthralled, captivated and empowered by these stories and this process. All power to Dianne Bell, the Ngarrindjeri miminar and to Spinifex Press for producing such a stunning document that could not have been timed better for the Great Auzzie Apology. Use this book to insist that more be done to act on that apology and to discover ways you can help support the movement for Ngarrindjeri and other Aboriginal cultures to retain their cultures, languages and rights. Make sure the Apology is backed up by action.

Unsettling the Land is a collaboration of a different kind, but one which has links to the themes of the Ngarrindjeri text. Here the powerful poems of Susan Hawthorne are beautifully enhanced by the imaginative art of Suzanne Bellamy. Fans of Hawthorne's impressive publishing portfolio, including novels, poetry, documentary, print and internet work and her performances, will be familiar with past collaborations she has done with Suzanne Bellamy. I will never forget being so entranced by the ceramic mastery of Bellamy on the cover of Susan Hawthorne's *The Falling Woman* that it took me a while to dive between the pages because I was so intent on capturing the ephemeral and ethereal imagery before finding what the text had to offer. I was not disappointed. This novel is still a favourite of mine, and stands up to the test of time on several readings. With the latent imagery of falling ever since the biblical 'fall' to the present day realities of falling as a woman living with epilepsy, as Hawthorne does, let alone one who dares to defy reality by becoming a circus aerialist as well, this book and Hawthorne's life and work is an impressive journey across many frontiers, where the reader is always surprised and constantly challenged to look within, as well as to look at the world in different ways.

This creative collaboration between Hawthorne and Bellamy has lasted over thirty years and is evocatively expressed in *Unsettling the Land*. Hawthorne's poetic voice details so much that has been lost by the first world presence of greed on this planet. These are my words, not hers. But, as I read this book, it was hard to divorce the current collapse of capitalism through a first world nation like Amerika living way beyonds its means from the devastating effects this is having on the rest of the world. Hawthorne re-members a childhood world of discovery of the natural world with her brother in *Birdlife*. Behind, Suzanne Bellamy sculpts an exquisitely female, Papatuanuku-shaped world into clay. The body of woman/land echoes out from the words and the images. What have we done to rape her so violently, so unforgivingly?

In 'Drought, 1967', Hawthorne recalls her mother's expression about the drought back then and how it broke her heart. It's now thirty years later and the poet wonders what her mother would say of the current drought and how long it might take for recovery. Behind these poignant words is a ceramic work by Bellamy that evokes a giant tree trunk etched with stories, symbolic images that might tell of times past, narratives from the centuries gone. On the top symbolic creatures lie on their backs, as if killed by the strength of the sun on the desert, their legs reaching skyward, as if pleading to the heavens for some kind of redemption, some answer to this drought. Both poem and image ask unanswerable questions, ask us to seek the answers. How can sustainability exist within a world bent

on such greed?

Just when you think the drought can never end, comes the 'Flood, 1974'. In this poem, the roar seems so vast it appears 'unearthly' to the poet. Yet she realises it is very earthly, in fact. A day of contrasts in a land of contrasts, the water 'thrilling to the sudden birdlife.' Behind the poem, Bellamy's images of women, a globe, faces and skulls and manuscripts, narratives of time and place and sustenance etch words onto a green and brown earth, rejoicing with water but being inundated by flood. When we use the resources unsustainably, we get the extremes of drought and flood. It's a fact. We see it daily and yearly. Yet we still consume.

'Water, 2008.' Suddenly we are immersed in water, drowning in the flood. The poet's words float on the sea, emerge from the surf. Here water is seen to fit the land like a glove fits the hand. It ekes its way into all the valleys and cracks. But drought 'is our unsettling' and claws at the land, 'it chops out the fingers/to claw at earth's innards.'

'Earth's Pod, 2008' shows the earth breaking open, a beautiful seed pod in Bellamy's ceramic imagination, while the poet's words talk of the forcing open of the world, the pod, to allow 'Big Mac houses cheek by jowl', causing her to plant trees by the dozen to make up for her overseas flights, to assuage her 'ecological guilt'. But is it so easy? We are left to contemplate the consequences. This poem and the imagery reminds me of Muriel Rukeyser's words when she contemplated what would happen if one woman spoke the truth about existence and surmised: 'The world would split open.'

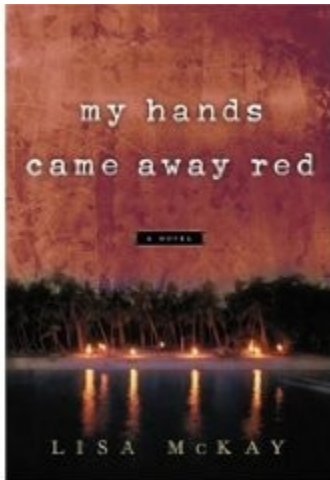
Unsettling the Land causes us to both appreciate and value nature and the earth we live in and to question how we leave our ecological footprint on it, just as Kungan Ngarrindjeri miminar Yunnan also talks of the importance of original footprints, of how we lay our print upon the land and the consequences of ignoring or suppressing these lives, these stories. Each book provides a blueprint for future survival hidden between the lines and stories. It is up to us to see the answers, and even more, to act on them.

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Dirty Tricks

Lisa McKay - My Hands Came Away Red, Chicago, Moody Publishers, 2007.

By Alison Lambert



This novel is available in Australia as well as the United States. A quick look at Moody Publishers, ‘The Name You Can Trust’, reveals connections to the Moody Church, a Bible College, and one of the largest media networks in the States. Moody’s list of titles and their blurbs in the ‘By and for women’ section, tell how the authors of these ‘excellent’ titles will ‘energize you to be an obedient follower of Christ in your various roles and relationships’. Need I expound? Being a Great Mom, Raising Great Kids; Capture His Heart: Becoming the Godly Wife Your Husband Desires; and The Companion Guide for Lies Women Believe, a text ‘breaking the chain of lies for good’ would probably make feminist readers curl their toes in horror. Further titles aim at helping readers make home décor easy, and recommend ‘the quiet

spaces within’.

My Hands Came Away Red is Lisa McKay’s first book. She is an Australian psychologist, living and working in Los Angeles. The story, told in the first person by 18-year-old Cori, follows a group of young Christians as they spend the American summer building a church on the island of Seram in eastern Indonesia. Just after the church is built, Muslims from a neighbouring village massacre the Indonesian pastor and his wife and other Christians from the village. The group has to flee to the mountains, led by the pastor’s 17-year-old son Mani. Hardships and adventures of the character-building kind ensue before the group makes it safely home.

I didn’t want to read this book. I expected the prejudice and stereotyping common in media-fed views of Indonesia and its mostly Muslim population, fuelled by the moral high ground created by the massacre of East Timorese by the Indonesian military. Every time I go to Indonesia (my daughter has lived there for 12 years), well-meaning friends become anxious for my safety; one person warned me to watch out during Ramadan, when ‘they all go troppo’. (Indonesia is a hugely diverse place and many experiences are possible, but I have never encountered the remotest hint of trouble there.) My daughter read the review copy long before I did and left copious annoyed notes on its inconsistencies and inaccuracies. Finally getting past my resistance to the alarmist title, I could see what she meant.

Lisa McKay’s novel, her first, is fast-paced and the sort of story that makes you read to the end to see what happens. It begins with the narrator, wanting to escape a sticky love affair, deciding to join the youth group for the summer. Cori emerges as a wry and plucky young woman who is popular with her peers. Her narrative voice is witty and soul-searching. Her crisis of faith, questioning God, runs through the story, showing honesty to be one of her strong points. In fact, despite her self-confessed cowardice and modesty, she’s hard to fault. Throughout the ordeals, Cori shows a sterling range of

qualities that would make her surely fit for leadership grooming at the Moody Bible Institute.

Cori's apparently factual style of reportage lulls the uncritical reader into believing what she says is true. The worry is that readers will believe Moody Publishers to be a trustworthy filter of the world out there ('The Name You Can Trust'), and wouldn't dream such a reputable Christian publisher could do anything dodgy. But dodginess is rife in the background of this text.

Indonesia is the fourth most populous country in the world, with approximately 245 million people. 88% of these identify as Muslims and 6% as Protestant Christians. Islam arrived in the region in the fourteenth century, replacing Hindu and Buddhist belief and has been connected with a rich history; Dutch missionaries introduced Protestantism in the sixteenth century.

Seram and its close neighbour Ambon are part of the Spice Islands, also known as the Moluccas or Maluku. This region of Indonesia, because of its rich resources of cloves and nutmeg (more costly than gold at one time), has been fought over by the Portuguese, the British and the Dutch. When the locals tried to set up their own trading scheme, they were massacred for their trouble. A significant section of the indigenous population embraced Christianity, and was rewarded by the Dutch with jobs and education. The Moluccas became one area of the archipelago where Christians felt less of a minority. The Dutch used Ambonese Christians as mercenaries in their colonial regime which lasted for more than 350 years until it was rejected by the Indonesians during the war of Independence in 1945.

An ideological strategy called *pancasila*, a five-point plan to create harmony and acceptance of difference, was introduced post-independence, but has always been open to interpretation according to whose interests were being served. The centuries-old system of *pela gandong*, reinforced by the military under Suharto, creates associations between villages of differing faiths but historically has not prevented violence breaking out between participants. A further element of tensions to the historical background of this region is the unpopular practice of *transmigrasi*, where Javanese (usually Muslims) are transported to less crowded outer islands. Ambon and its close neighbour Seram are right at the heart of these tensions.

Given that *Hands* is set just after Indonesia's devastating fires, the economic crisis of 1996 and the riots leading to the downfall of President Suharto (31), the question arises, within the parameters of the novel, why allow a youth group to visit a region in turmoil at this time? When the group arrives on Ambon, a local Christian worker admits there are 'already tense relationships [between Muslim areas and] nearby Christian areas and missionaries' and that their presence 'could spark a riot' (42). The issue is downplayed, though Cori later overhears someone's misgivings. The woman voicing her worries in private is silenced, yet unfolding events vindicate her concern.

It is a narrative convenience that the group is sent to a potential trouble spot: the massacre and the group's flight from it make for dramatic story telling. These events also allow the showcasing of Muslim/Christian conflict. I am constantly appalled at the bad reputation of Indonesia and of Muslims, a view fostered by the press and usually held by people with little or no first-hand experience of either the place or its people. I am horrified by this author's choice of story. So many stories could be told: why choose to expose this aspect of Indonesia, especially in these times of brittle understandings?

Nowhere in my reading of *Hands* did I encounter recognition that the secular state of Indonesia has the largest Muslim population in the world, and practises a moderate form of Islam*. The youth group has learnt ‘stuff about Islam’ (41), yet Kyle still has to be told in his missionary zeal that ‘Christian evangelism in Muslim areas is technically illegal in Indonesia’ (42). Moody publishes titles about other religions in a section named ‘Cults and Other Religions’. One of these, *Christ Among Other gods [sic]: A Defence of Christ in an Age of Intolerance* (Erwin W. Lutzer) challenges ‘the claim that no religion can be superior to another...religion is not a wheel whose varied religions are spokes that ultimately lead to the same peace and harmony at the core’. In the current political climate, why has Indonesia been selected as background for this drama?

It’s easy to imagine a sinister explanation of the choice of story, which is borne out by an online review under [Christian Book Previews.com](http://ChristianBookPreviews.com). The unnamed writer says McKay has written ‘a compelling, powerful story on a subject too often ignored in fiction; the persecution of Christians. She shows the confusion, the lies, and the dangers of vengeance upon vengeance that destroys a people. And she does it well, so well that it doesn’t read like fiction [...] she tells the story so realistically at times that I had to remind myself this was a novel’. Here is an authoritative voice speaking, showing readers the way to receive this book. The eight reader reviews on the site all award the book five stars.

However, the reader lacking critical skills or an open mind will construct gratuitous understandings of Indonesia and Muslims, ‘these people’. Arriving at Ambon airport, the air smells of ‘wet dirt, tobacco, bodies, and spices’; the porters are ‘short’; ‘tiny’ women mop the floor ‘slowly’; the Muslim women are ‘openly staring and laughing’; teeth are ‘stained’; ‘more than one person trie[s] to talk to [the new arrivals]’; the driver runs a red light; there are ‘scrawny chickens’; beggars, one with a ‘flat gaze’; there is an ‘open sewer’ (40-41). Towards the end of the story, when Cori’s group encounters a sympathetic Muslim village where people have recently been killed by Christians, a further impression of laziness and apathy is given. Men are ‘smoking and squatting, leaning against walls in the shade’; the houses are built of cinderblocks ‘that looked like they had once been white’; the women offering the water are ‘the village elder’s youngest wives’ (270-72). The overwhelming impression given is that these people can’t cope, can’t live in any way except dirt and ignorance.

I have seen areas of Indonesia where people indeed show the effects of poverty, where the lanes are indeed narrow and the streets and canals are dirty (though I’ve never seen raw sewage as is implied). Nevertheless, people are clean: the custom throughout Indonesia is to wash twice daily. Even the poorest hovels are immaculate inside; children invariably appear from these in clean and ironed school uniforms. As for the notoriously bad drivers of Asia, sooner or later you come to realise their great skill on narrow crowded roads, and that accidents are not at all commonplace. I also know of several instances where Muslims and Christians are friends on equal footing. My daughter’s Indonesian mother-in-law had a Christian girl as a boarder for some time, who was treated as one of the (Muslim) family.

On the run from the savage Muslims, Indonesia is experienced at dirt level by Cori and her band: the word ‘dirt’ is used often throughout the text. Even the ‘good’ Indonesian Muslims who give hospitality to the desperate group offer water in ‘chipped, grimy glasses...please don’t let this make us sick’ Cori thinks as she takes hers (271). (Yet funnily enough, the Indonesians I have encountered,

from poor to wealthy, don't want to get sick either, and invariably boil their drinking water or buy bottled water.) Haji Kembang, the compassionate head of this village, is a cripple, 'hobbling along at a remarkable pace' (268). Mani, on the other hand, as we are shown from the start is taller and better looking and has a better command of English, as though his Christianity confers upon him such blessings. He has 'large, gorgeous, dark brown eyes' (43), and at one stage when he is looking lonely, Cori is tempted to put her arms around him. But 'more than the fire separated us. I knew that would only make him uncomfortable' (197). How does she know? I can't think what would separate them ideologically if it's not religion; there are plenty of successful marriages between Indonesians and Westerners. Could it possibly be Cori's own unacknowledged prejudice? She shows no qualms about expressing her attraction to Kyle, and indeed shows more than a soupçon of sexual feeling, an obligatory ingredient for reader appeal.

Back at Moody Publishing's web-site, their vision statement says it will 'proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ and a biblical worldview in such creative and powerful ways that individuals worldwide will live in increasing measure as His fully devoted followers...by ethically publishing conservative, evangelical Christian literature...for all ages around the world...'. And so appears under their imprint a book aimed at young readers, a cracking tale of adventure and survival, a bit of love interest thrown in, as well as some serious questioning of faith. A reader review on an Australian web-site, Koorong Press, gives the book five stars and raves 'Hard to put down!'

Creative and powerful ways indeed: how to juggle the need for a worthy heroine/protagonist, a model for young women, while exemplifying Christian values for women? How to appropriate feminism, some aspects of which are popular with young women, while not completely espousing it? Throughout the ordeals the group undergoes, Cori appears exemplary. Her questioning of God in the face of the atrocities she has witnessed runs through the story, showing honesty to be one of her strong points. In fact despite her narrative stance of cowardice and modesty, she's hard to fault. As the story unfolds, heroine Cori is strong, brave, intelligent, resourceful, responsible and perceptive. The other two girls, Elissa and Drew, are respectively quietly useful, and hysterical. While Drew seems to cry all the way, Cori gives in to tears only rarely and when alone. When surprised by Mani, she curses her "self-indulgent inattention". She won't let herself be a burden by showing such weakness, instead encouraging Mani to share his troubles (197).

Out of this litany of goodness a pattern emerges. Given Cori's qualities, why was she not leading the party and making major decisions? Answer: she's a girl. And good Christian girls defer to their menfolk. Mani, as the son of the murdered pastor, wears an invisible mantle as though blessed by God, and this, added to his survival skills in the Indonesian jungle, confers upon him an invincibility the others can't match. Cori has differing issues with the other three boys, and deals with them in interesting ways. She distances herself from her propensity for coming out with sensible statements: "'But what about what's going on in Ambon?" Mark asked. "We don't really have a choice," I heard myself say' (124).

Thus the narrator has it both ways; she's seen as a heroine and a model to emulate, while assuming the modesty of a self-confessed mixed-up kid. During the violence, Cori orders the others to 'Get the tents. Everything in them. All the packs. Food if you can. Into the trees. Now.' But her voice 'sounded strange, as though it was coming from a long way away' (92). Later, when Brendan asks her if she is all right, Cori is 'sorely tempted to ask him what on earth he meant', given the horrific

circumstances they have just seen, but instead of saying what she thinks, she ‘raise[s] the palm of [her] hand to [her] forehead and trie[s] to grind away the tension’ (107). She reflects on the reality of the situation: ‘I rested my head on my knees and was almost glad for the dark. When the others couldn’t see me I didn’t have to pretend to be strong’ (127). When Kyle is attacked by an enraged boar, however, she yells at him and kicks at the dead pig (204). Her attraction to Kyle makes it OK: he is the right age, the right gender, and the right nationality. It is permissible for a girl her age to be overwhelmed by feeling for the right guy. She is a good little Eve too, being suitably terrified by an encounter with a harmless though large python (136), yet shows great courage in dragging Kyle away from the boar (202).

I now come to discussion of the aspect of *My Hands Came Away Red* that worries me the most. Some critics have said the book is ‘even-handed in its treatment of Muslims’; I don’t think so. Right from the start, though there is lip service to fairness, I found a story rife with connotation, littered with seemingly incidental details of an apparently dirty, ignorant society. Such description is anything but innocent.

The question of why this book is set mainly in poor and remote villages in Indonesia has puzzled me. However given the way the text works by multiple connotations, innuendo, and juxtaposition, I can only conclude that Muslims are under attack in the subtlest of ways. By their constant association with the ‘dirt’ so frequently mentioned, seemingly as descriptive asides, the unaware reader will find herself colluding with the view of the narrator. Mud sticks. Cori seems to be a keen observer: objective and factual, aided literally and metaphorically by her camera. She even decides to do journalism at University. Yet there’s no mention of educated and worldly Muslims, living in cities and towns.

Cori often muses, despairing that ‘nothing makes sense’. The worry is that readers will draw, as readers do, on previous convictions and experience, to make their own form of sense from this book’s subtexts. It’s tricky; the author has been creative indeed to couch common prejudices in a narrative that appears to be fair. ‘Why should Satan have all the good writers?’ could be another Moody byline.

Towards the end of writing this review I was directed to Late Night Live (Monday June 16 2008, ABC Radio National) where Philip Adams spoke with Jeff Sharlet, author of *The Family: Power, Politics and Fundamentalism’s Shadow Elite* (UQP). Even the urbane Adams was shocked at Sharlet’s exposition on the Christian Right in America. The ‘Family’ is a secretive US organisation which hosts but one public event a year, the National Prayer Breakfast, to which 4000 heads of state from around the world, including despots, are invited. The US President gives the closing address. The Family’s origins go back to 1935, when an evangelist named Frank Buchman coined a term that stuck, ‘moral re-armament’. ‘There is tremendous power’, he preached, ‘in a minority guided by God’ (see Jeff Sharlet’s excellent web-site *The Revealer*, ‘a daily review of religion and the press’). Members of The Family openly admire the methods of Hitler, Stalin and Mao, claiming these dictators understood the total commitment to authority that Jesus taught. The example cited on Late Night Live was how the Red Guards were able to decapitate their parents, due to Mao’s training. ‘God’s mysterious ways’ ‘beyond the noise of vox populi’ are cited as driving decisions that affect whole nations; funding was poured into Indonesia when Suharto was in power, for example.

My deep concern is that a seemingly innocent little book like *My Hands Came Away Red* can trace its editorial lineage directly back to the machinations of *The Family*. An excerpt from Sharlet's book on *The Revealer* site claims: '...every believer becomes an informer on him or herself. Censorship becomes a function of the soul, not of the state; pastors needn't bother with speech that is never spoken'. In *Hands*, it's hard to pinpoint any direct condemnation of Muslims; the literary technique of 'show, don't tell' is used brilliantly, while the narrator's reporterly voice and aspiration adds to the truthful tone. And throughout the book the young people constantly debate what God might want, or mean, lacking of course their spiritual leaders to interpret for them. One would have to live in a backwater not to be aware of the huge power of the modern-day preacher in America, and increasingly so in this country.

Such issues as evolution are no longer taught in many schools in the US, as a result of the massive influence of the Christian Right. The representation of Indonesia and its people, even its environment, in *Hands* is in my view damaging Christian propaganda. Even the boar which attacks Kyle (after being poked by his machete) is 'the ugliest animal' Cori has ever seen (201). Superlatives real and imagined abound in this creative hotbed of dirty tricks.

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*My daughter has noted in her reading of studies on women in Islam that Indonesia is often left out. She surmises that its inclusion would skew the results, because of Indonesia's population and more moderate form of Islam.

Alison Lambert began writing poetry and short stories while a mature age student at The University of Queensland. Now quite widely published, she lives on the Blackall Range, north of Brisbane.

Extravagant Hats and a Suave Manner

Robert Freestone and Bronwyn Hanna - *Florence Taylor's Hats: Designing, Building and Editing*
Sydney, Ultimo, NSW: Halstead Press, 2007

By Janine Burke



Florence Taylor has much in common with that other talented bluffer and braggart - Florence Broadhurst. The latter, a successful Sydney wallpaper designer, was so adept at reinvention that her identity remains a series of shifting, enigmatic images. Born in outback Queensland, Broadhurst travelled to Shanghai in the 1930s where she became a chanteuse. In wartime London, she cast herself as a French couturier called Madame Pellier. Returning to Australia, she announced she was an English painter destined to immortalise the Australian landscape. When that plan fell flat, Broadhurst became a designer, running a studio in a tin shed next door to her truck and car yard in Crow's Nest. A partygirl and a celebrity seeker with a manner that was as brazen as her sense of style, Broadhurst was, well, very Sydney. She is the sort of fabulous liar who belongs in a Peter Carey novel.

Taylor and Broadhurst belong to a coterie of larger-than-life Sydney women modernists that includes Margaret Preston, that stormed its way around town, demanding and gaining attention. (Freestone and Hanna mention neither Broadhurst nor Preston.) Taylor used extravagant hats and a suave manner to advertise herself. Preston, known as 'Mad Maggie', threw a plate of cakes at fellow painter Thea Proctor when she learnt that Proctor's work had been bought by the Art Gallery of NSW while hers had not. It is an apocryphal tale, probably cooked up by Preston herself. They were a cheerfully shameless bunch of women.

Freestone and Hanna's detailed introduction describes the arc of Taylor's brilliant career, as well as her some of her other, more odious qualities. She was Australia's first professionally qualified, practising woman architect. She was the first woman in Australia to qualify as an engineer and the first to fly a glider. She was a planning advocate, as well as writer, editor and publisher for Building magazine. She made heaps of money and assumed the role of a grande dame in Sydney's social scene. She was, as the authors describe her, 'patrician yet gracious, formidable and opinionated, impeccably dressed in beautiful Edwardian style dresses and sporting a grand hat.' For all that Taylor seems to qualify as a feminist icon, her politics were rightwing, even fascist-leaning at times, and she 'railed against unions, strikes, Labor politicians and bureaucratic controls of all kinds.'

Importantly for her time, Florence married well. At the turn of the twentieth century, it was hard work to be a gifted, ambitious woman without the respectability and financial clout of a solid, middleclass marriage. Thea Proctor's fate, struggling to survive by painting fans and running art classes, is a case in point. George Taylor was an intriguing imp of a man. Trained as an architectural draughtsman, he was also a cartoonist, writer and pamphleteer. George also boasted a string of firsts -

the first person to transmit a picture by radio and the first man in Australia to fly. Like Margaret Preston, who married wealthy businessman William Preston, as soon as Florence was hitched 'the triumphant Taylors' went on grand global tours. Then they designed their own home and began a publishing business.

Where did Florence's chutzpah come from? Her mother died in 1896, when she was seventeen, her father when she was twenty. She had two younger sisters to take care of. She probably worked as a housemaid before getting a job as a clerk with the architect Francis Stowe. It seems likely she had an affair with Stowe, who took her under his wing, and helped her financially. Stowe's family was not impressed with Florence. One of his daughters described her as 'amoral, ruthless and selfish.' Such ugly, uncomfortable details are omitted from Florence's life story as she told it, countless times, to journalists and others. The affair with Stowe, the authors suggest, may have also been a reason she was "black-balled" when she attempted to gain accreditation from the NSW Institute of Architects in 1907.

Where are Florence's buildings? In various interviews, Florence declared she had designed fifty, even a hundred houses in her spare time. But, as Freestone and Hanna point out, 'her design work remains almost unknown and establishing her singular authorship of any extant buildings...has proved surprisingly challenging.' After extensive research, the authors can state there are 'several homes... [that] were respectable expressions of the Federation Style' that can be linked to Florence. They are obviously frustrated by the lack of documentation, especially 'within a life where memorialising of achievements was habitual.'

I don't mind that Florence's buildings may have largely been castles in the air. It seems she was too busy creating the space to frame and represent her self to contribute in any significant manner to the built environment. The inner struggle, the persistent need to attract attention that suggests a desperate hunger for affirmation, was always going to subsume external ambitions, such as completing major, solo, architectural commissions. Florence, with her hats and her vaulting ego, was her own edifice, her own construction. Her choice of profession may have been accidental, but architecture - the realisation of a habitable, three dimensional dwelling - provides an interesting metaphor for a young woman's need to control her destiny, to make the space that is her own, to locate and shelter her self. Temperamentally, Florence shares with architects, traditionally forming a stubborn and visionary profession, the will to power that brooks no demur.

While the book is meticulously researched, it has not been served well by its publishers. For example, in the Introduction, do we also need a section devoted to the Structure of the Book? It is a flaw of academic publishing to bang the reader on the head with too much detail, too many restatements of the central thesis. Sentences are sometimes plodding, lengthy and archaically phrased. Beginning a sentence with 'one might have expected' is positively nineteenth century, let alone twentieth. A good editor would winnow out such inconsistencies that deaden the book's lively and engaging tone. It would have also been valuable to contextualise Taylor with other prominent and dynamic Sydney women modernists involved in art and design such as Preston, Proctor and Broadhurst.

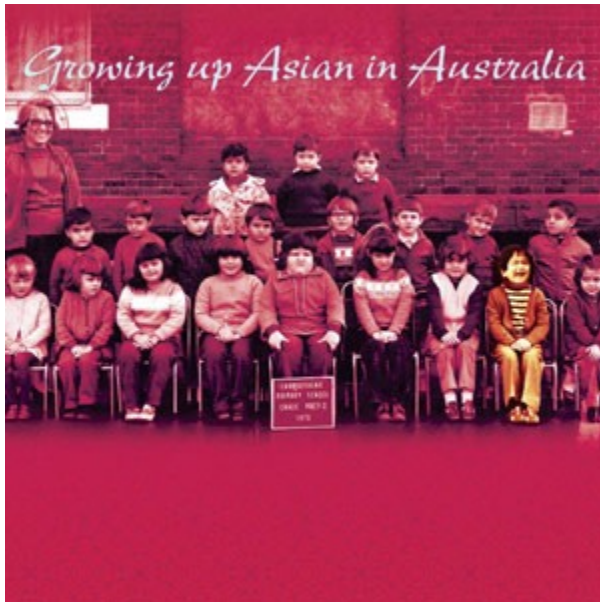
Janine Burke is Monash Fellow, Centre for Women's Studies and Gender Research and School of English, Communications and Performance Studies. Her books include *Australian Women Artists:*

1840-1940, Australian Gothic: A Life of Albert Tucker and The Heart Garden: Sunday Reed and Heide.

Indian Odours and Other Asianisms

Alice Pung - *Growing Up Asian In Australia*, Melbourne: Black Inc, 2008

By Jay B. Panicker



A cacophony of giggly girls, and other miscellaneous sounds of children at play fill the classroom. Amidst all the noise, an exhausted Sister takes her routine nap with her head slumped on the teacher's desk. This time, her mouth is wide open, saliva collects around it in a little puddle. In an arbitrary moment, a friend and I come up with the 'ingenious' idea of placing a piece of chalk into her gaping mouth (it seemed like a funny idea at the time). We make our way to Sister's desk. The class is silently watching our stealthy movements. The fresh chalk feels smooth in my palm. We are poised, barely an inch away from our prey, when my friend whispers from behind me: 'You smell really nice for an Indian.'

I couldn't be more grateful to my mother. Every morning, whilst I did my colouring on the floor of her room, she would rub the excess Lancôme Miracle on me. Apart from being a time of many firsts, as Melbourne based lawyer, Alice Pung mentions in her latest anthology, *Growing Up Asian In Australia*, growing up is also a time for being (brutally) honest, and where we form perceptions of ourselves, and others. My friend's comment shaped my identity as an Indian who is as Indian as India Arie. I was particularly obsessive about the way I smelt. Friends knew me by my scent(s). There were times when my father would choke in the car, because he found my Impulse too overpowering.

In 2006, Pung provided a fresh voice to the Australian literary scene with her autobiographical novel, *Unpolished Gem*. She is back again, along with a fleet of Asian Australian writers. Pung has brought together in the anthology works from a range of artists. It features a combination of poetry, autobiographical prose, and cartoons detailing the Asian Australian experience. It explores the adversities of living in conflicting cultures, Asian and Australian - the former being the antithesis of the latter. The varied authorship of the anthology brings an assortment of voices together. Pung has categorised the works around loose themes such as 'Strine', 'Pioneers', 'Battlers', 'Legends', 'The Hots', 'Folks', 'The Clan', 'Homecoming' and many more.

'Strine' is an integral part of most Asian cultures. Like many Asian Australians, I have been bilingual all my life. I speak English most of the time, and reserve my native Tamil for weekly long-distance calls to my grandmother. Despite the years of Tamil tutoring my mother forced on me, my

conversations with grandmother are stilted, peppered with English. In the anthology, 'Strine' deals with similar issues, providing insight on moving through a second language, and of parents' struggle to embed a little native-culture in their kin. It costs Amy Choi the loss of her grandfather to appreciate her native tongue. The bane of Ivy Tseng's Saturdays were gruelling Chinese lessons, imposed by her father.

'Pioneers', 'Battlers' and 'Legends', indicative of national pride, were selected by Pung with 'a certain irony'. The traits are no longer confined to those with 'white faces'. Asian Australians are becoming a part of Australia's history. 'Pioneers' explores the courage and strength of people who come to Australia in search of a better life. I suppose in every such family there is a 'Pioneer'. I, for one, admire my great grandfather's amazing courage for running away from his home at a tender age. It features Ken Chau's political poems, and Francis Lee's moving autobiographical account of leaving all that he knew in Hong Kong to come to Australia in 1961, otherwise known as the Upside Down Year.

'Battlers' tells of extraordinary families that, despite the odds, achieved goals through persistence, and determination. In many ways, Asian Australian families have battled for their place, and sense of identity in a white dominated society. Lily Chan explains the ordeal of having her home morph into a Chinese restaurant by night. Kevin Lai and Matt Huynh also portray graphically a family's losing battle to bankruptcy.

Pung's 'Legends' are far from Elvis Presley types; rather, they are the most ordinary of people. Phillip Tseng writes of his legend father who has an uncanny ability to predict upcoming deaths. Cindy Pan experiences a connection with the dancing legend of an old man through 'Dancing Lessons'. Shalini Akhil fantasises about becoming an Indian Superwoman who makes perfectly round rotis, just like her grandmother.

Sexuality, love, and other matters of that ilk are featured in 'The Hots'. We take a profound look at how Asian constraints loosen up when faced with less conservative norms. We come across exotic Portuguese-Filipino, Xerxes Matsas whose family's virility did not rub off on him. Lian Low orchestrates her first kiss in an award winning film production. In her 'Big Life', Jenny Kee recounts her days as play girl.

Folks are anything but the Asian Australian teenager's rant about his or her conservative, frog-in-the-well parents. Asian Australian writers look up to their parents in admiration for their struggles. Simone Lazaroo writes about her father's last days, enduring a mysterious 'Asian Disease'. It also explores a parent's own grievances as children grow to become different people altogether. A mother's own struggle and failure are explored in Vanessa Woods' 'Perfect Chinese Children'. 'The Clan' relates to the (changing) Asian norm where parents must stay together, and forever feuding families. I personally can attest to the latter; family reunions were usually rounded off by a drunken spat or two between the elders. Benjamin Law recounts his experience with parental separation, while Ken Chan writes about feuding families from a child's perspective.

'Homecoming' features accounts of Asian Australians returning to ancestral homes. Kylie Kwong relates her experience of being the first in her lineage to visit her ancestral home in China. Blossom Beeby takes another touching path to find her Korean roots and her biological mother.

Pung has also included a section, 'Tall Poppies', featuring profiles of inspirational Asian Australians like Shaun Tan and Anh Do. Despite the term's negative connotations, Pung aims to cast a new light upon what is referred to as a model minority.

Far from being a plethora of rants on the adversities of growing up as a minority, *Growing Up Asian In Australia* provides a hearty, wholesome, and humorous look at what it is like coming from a dual cultural background. If anything, the book provided me with the insight that race, colour, and the way we smell aren't the measure of a person. Next time, I'll go easy on my Estée Lauder.

Jay B. Panicker is a Singapore born and bred Creative Writing student at Queensland University of Technology.

A Matter of Perspective

**Joan Coxsedg e - Cold Tea for Brandy: A Tale of Protest, Painting and Politics, Vulcan Press:
Balwyn North, 2007**

By Fiona McKean

Cold Tea for Brandy is the autobiography of Joan Coxsedg e—artist, activist, author and former member of the Victorian Legislative Council.

Early in her autobiography, Coxsedg e sets the scene for her future activism with a typically frank declaration: ‘I walked late but talked early and often, a condition that persisted’ (18). Coxsedg e reveals herself, however, to be no mere talker - by early adulthood she had harnessed some of her formidable energy and compassion towards a stint in nursing and membership of the Congress for International Cooperation and Disarmament, while also developing her artistic talents through night classes and work as a fabric designer and drafts person. So, from the start, Coxsedg e grounds her recollections in the dual perspectives of activist and artist.

By the 1960s, Coxsedg e had become increasingly politicised by the anti-Vietnam war movement, forcing her twin interests into collision:

My rage at Australia’s complicity in the fearful destruction spilled over into my art and forced me out of my studio and into the streets, because I could no longer stand at my easel painting pretty pictures of fishing boats and wharves and water as if I was living in a political vacuum. With some regret, I packed away my oil paints and brushes to become a protester. (7)

These perspectives do not stay unreconciled for long. One of the things that makes Cold Tea for Brandy psychologically rewarding is that Coxsedg e is someone who achieves integration. Within a short period of time, she was invited to join the Realist Group, an avant-garde movement whose members used art for political purposes. The subject matter of her paintings shifted from peaceful fishing scenes to dark portraits of Vietnamese peasant women. After protesting against ‘secret police’ and joining the ALP, the twin strands of her life became further entwined when she worked as the official artist for the BLF’s ‘Green Bans’ buildings, an experience which Coxsedg e describes as ‘a wonderful opportunity to compare architectural styles and a wonderful opportunity to walk into a minefield of internecine union warfare’ (130).

Clearly, Coxsedg e is a quick learner - she negotiated her rise through the ranks of the ALP, culminating in thirteen years membership of the Victorian Legislative Council. As well as representing her constituents at the grassroots level - Coxsedg e ‘never committed the mortal sin/of forgetting the people who voted [her] in’ (4) - she was active in a wide variety of causes, fighting for issues such as peace, women’s rights, and the right to privacy and limitation of the State’s ability to intrude into the lives of individuals. She travelled to Greenham Common, Pine Gap and Cuba, while continuing to paint and draw. Often she donated the profits from sales of her artwork to causes she supported, further proving her ability to ‘walk her talk’ and connect her two great areas of interest.

Coxsedge's tone is conversational, familiar and humorous. Examples of the latter include her descriptions of George W Bush as 'the world's most powerful man - a complete moron' (416), John Howard - 'a political manipulator with the charisma of a piece of limp lettuce' (416) and the Victorian Upper House, the inhabitants of which she describes as 'some almost alive and some almost half-dead/the boss cocky wears a dead sheep on his head' (3). As well as demonstrating her playful, irreverent approach, inclusive of self-parody, these comments point towards Coxsedge's bluntness, which can be extreme, and which some readers may find confronting. What is not so readily apparent is that this bluntness characterises a near-Keatsian sensibility. It seems that for Coxsedge, beauty is literally truth, and truth beauty. Her sharp eye for the aesthetic is matched by an equally sharp eye for hypocrisy.

Unfortunately, the strong sense of structure so evident in her sketches and drawings is not a feature of Coxsedge's writing. Although her account is mostly chronological, at 419 pages Coxsedge's work encompasses several detours and details. While these details do give us a clear sense of the author and her life, I can't help but feel that this book would have benefited from a harder edit. Although Coxsedge clearly favours a 'warts and all' approach, minor errors are unnecessary distractions from a lively and engaging story. Perhaps this is a consequence of not publishing through a more commercial publisher - and, at a time when houses increasingly choose to publish mainstream works driven by bottom-dollar concerns, surely the lesser evil is that Coxsedge did manage to publish *Cold Tea for Brandy*.

What emerges unalloyed from these details and anecdotes is Coxsedge's own unique perspective. Her account is rigorously honest, authentic and unreserved. Her style and substance are wholly interconnected and integrated. She is who she is, and she is who she says she is: open, outspoken and socialist to the core. This self-awareness is not, however, introspective; rather, her work is instructive. Part of Coxsedge's appeal lies in her instinct to reach out and connect. *Cold Tea for Brandy* is an example of how a life can be lived fully and selflessly - without apathy and without fear.

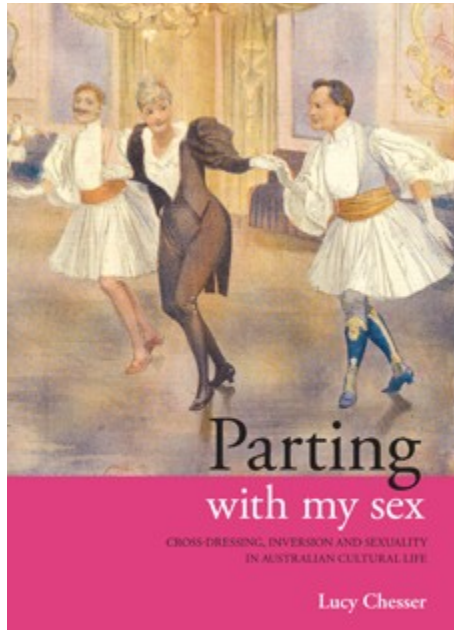
Coxsedge's autobiography hints at a choice for readers: between consumerist insularity and individualism - 'most Australians couldn't care less as they shop, shop till they drop, filling their huge McMansions with expensive gadgets they cannot afford, while sitting on the sidelines cheering on their favourite footie team' (415). Or life as Coxsedge has lived it - not on the sidelines, but in the thick of the scrum. A matter of perspective, really.

Fiona McKean has recently studied in English, Media Studies and Art History at The University of Queensland.

Cross-dressing in Australia

Lucy Chesser - *Parting with my Sex: Cross-dressing, Inversion and Sexuality in Australian Cultural Life*, Sydney: Sydney University Press, 2008.

By Sharon Bickle



In this ambitious work, Lucy Chesser offers a diachronic study of cross-dressing in Australia from convict times to the early twentieth-century. Chesser's book considers examples from the earliest days of European settlement, Indigenous women stock-workers in rural Australia, on the gold-fields, in nineteenth-century fiction and drama, late-Victorian male and female cross-dressers, World War I through to the early 1920s, and even reflects in conclusion on instances of cross-dressing and transgendered lives at the present time. She draws her case studies primarily from the pages of contemporary newspapers, but also from an impressive range of archival sources, and the book is liberally illustrated with fascinating photographs and pictures. To my mind, the unnecessarily broad scope of this book - all of the major case studies date from the nineteenth-century - complicated by the decision to include both male and female cross-dressing, as well as fictional instances in novels and on-stage, creates problems in the text which would have been resolved by the adoption of a long nineteenth-century

approach. Nevertheless, in bringing these interesting case studies together for the first time, and particularly in her extensive archival research, Chesser makes a valuable contribution to understandings of the cultural history of Australia.

Chesser states in her introduction that the book is 'about cross-dressing and sexuality in Australian history' (xiv), and she divides the text into two sections with the first half attempting to 'look away' from issues of sexuality and the second engaging with the relationship between cross-dressing and 'deviant' sexuality. This is, in many ways, an uncomfortable division because while the book makes clear there is little contemporary association between female cross-dressing in particular and sexual inversion before the 1920s, all the case studies nonetheless provide considerable scope for queer (a term inexplicably absent from the book) readings. It is only when it comes to male cross-dressers, such as the case of John Wilson, convicted of sodomy in 1863 and who begins the second section, that the question of overt homosexual motivation appears in the contemporary accounts; yet the voyeuristic, popular fascination accorded these investigations and trials - often reminiscent of the 'freak-show' - suggests that they were never completely divorced from the frisson of deviancy.

The opening chapters deal with the newspaper coverage of the story of Edward De Lacy Evans, who was revealed to be a woman upon admission to Kew Lunatic Asylum in September 1879. Evans, it was subsequently discovered, had been living as a man for some twenty years, working as a miner, marrying no less than three times and apparently fathering a child. In the newspapers, Evans's

lifestyle and particularly the marriages were attributed to insanity, with 'his' wives depicted as unwitting victims of a cunning masquerade. Evans was released from Kew after three months, dressed in women's clothing and apparently 'cured.' While the many people who had lived with and around Evans during his life as a man publicly declared themselves shocked by the revelations, Chesser argues for private knowledge and even acceptance of Evans which she suggests, derives from a wider familiarity with cross-dressing women in Australian and European culture. She highlights the many 'real life' and fictional examples of women dressing in male clothes to work or travel safely; and argues that cases of other long-term 'passing' women such as Jack Jorgensen meant Evans's situation was not unique. Indeed, Chesser persuasively suggests that the familiarity of narratives of cross-dressed women exerted a normative influence on cases such as Evans, and deflected concerns regarding (homo)sexual impropriety. In chapter three, the book extends this argument by examining an incident of cross-dressing by one of Evans's fellow emigrants, Mary Rutledge, and the common prevalence of gender impersonation as masquerade in the theatre or for amusement.

Chapter four considers the common practice of providing men's clothing to Indigenous women stockworkers, and the ways in which this was related to fears about Indigenous women and their sexuality. This discussion then turns, slightly awkwardly, into a consideration of fictional narratives in which plucky, young (white) women display their colonial resourcefulness by adopting male attire: to support herself and her child in the illustrated short story 'Tumpkin's Baby' (Boomerang 1888); to work alongside men or travel safely in the Adventures of Ralph Rashleigh; or to deal with disfigurement in Praed's Fugitive Anne (1903) and Tasma's 'Monsieur Caloshe' (1890). All of these narratives define cross-dressed women in terms of their perceived heterosexual vulnerability rather than any potential for lesbian attraction.

The final chapter of the first section takes as its subject the 1890s; a period in which social changes impacted specifically on gender roles and provoked considerable cultural anxiety. Focusing on the Sydney newspapers, Truth and Dead Bird, Chesser notes cartoons and illustrations of men, notably politicians, in petticoats or dresses, and representations of pants-wearing women related to concerns about the masculinized New Woman and the emergent feminist movement. These relate to quite separate anxieties: the images of solemn and bearded men in dresses, engaged in activities such as dusting, tend to reinforce gender boundaries by pointing to the absurdity or 'unnaturalness' of men engaging in women's work. Anxieties surrounding women's franchise and women's entrance into the public sphere speak to a deeper concern with gender blurring. In many ways, this chapter is the least satisfying in the book because it engages only superficially with the sexual politics of the 1890s. Concepts such as the Girl of the Period, the New Woman, feminism and dress reform remain undeveloped, and there is little exploration of the historical context in terms of the Australian situation and the obvious influence of the British Rational Dress movement, Bloomerism, or other feminist campaigns.

The second half of the book begins strongly with a case study of John Wilson, a Fitzroy man arrested in 1863 for being in female attire and subsequently sentenced to be executed for sodomy. Wilson cross-dressed to pursue a career as prostitute, and was well-known to local johns, all of whom denied knowledge of his gender, and made statements attesting they had noticed no difference between sex with Wilson and a biological woman. Wilson's plea for clemency included an explanation of how he tricked his clients into believing themselves to be with a woman whilst never actually penetrating his

body. The singular importance of penetration or 'connection' to cultural and legal understandings of sex in itself perhaps goes some way to explaining the pervasive lack of concern regarding women cross-dressers and transgressive sexuality. Indeed, one of the ironies of any link between cross-dressed women and lesbianism must be that while to the twenty-first century mind there may appear to be an obvious connection between the woman in male attire and the often stigmatized representation of the butch lesbian; in actual fact, before the twentieth-century, any woman seriously interested in carrying on a lesbian relationship could only draw unwelcome attention from cross-dressing in a time when women living together, and even sharing a bed, was a completely acceptable practice.

Chapter seven explores the case of Gordon Lawrence, some twenty-five years after Wilson, and the development of a broader understanding of male homosexual identity in the wake of the work of late-nineteenth century sexologists such as Henry Havelock Ellis. In spite of this, Chesser argues convincingly that there was still a high degree of acceptance for cross-dressing when it could be accommodated to a narrative of masquerade or youthful high spirits. However, any question of homosexual misconduct for male cross-dressers could lead to determined and harsh prosecution. Lawrence was also a Fitzroy man, and I suspect that an analysis of the relationship of class to the policing and prosecution of these cases would be a valuable addition to this study. It would also be interesting to read Chesser's insights on whether the working-class culture of the area contributed to what she identifies as a widespread knowledge and even acceptance of cross-dressed individuals within their local area.

The final two chapters of the book return to the issue of women cross-dressers and are the most successful. In chapter 9, Chesser effectively maps the rise of public awareness of inversion by contrasting the changing focus on the exploits of Marion-Bill Edwards between 1906, 1908 and 1916. During her 1916 prosecution for sly-grog, Chesser highlights the prosecution's particular concern - irrelevant to the terms of the charge - with who slept with whom in a single bed apartment in which three adults (two women and a man) lived. The discomfort of the other woman in admitting she did not sleep with the man speaks to an awareness of lesbian possibilities that would never have occurred in earlier times.

Theoretically, this book situates itself alongside the work of Judith Butler and Marjorie Garber. Michel Foucault's identification of the emergence of the homosexual in the late-Victorian period influences the latter parts of the book, but Chesser is not primarily interested in cross-dressing and the performative nature of gender, or as it intersects with queer theory. Nor does she concern herself in a sustained manner with questions of the way in which her considerable and impressive archival materials, drawn from newspapers, legal and institutional documents and one autobiography, themselves represent the problematic relationship between women's history and the archive. Although this book specifically engages with reading the gaps and silences in the historical record in order to reveal cultural attitudes to the cross-dressed man or woman - and it often does this very successfully - I feel it would have been improved considerably by a more self-reflexive methodology. Statements such as the disturbing assertion in the Introduction that 'with so many newspapers and such an enormous timeframe, any notion of a systematic search was ridiculous, so I allowed myself the luxury of reading what interested me' (xiii) casts considerable doubt upon broad historical observations such as the notion that instances of cross-dressing (or reporting of cross-dressing) increase in times of cultural instability.

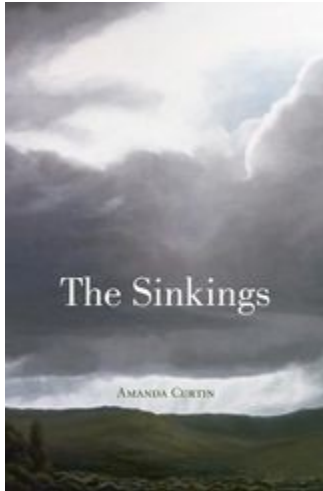
Overall, *Parting with my Sex* is a problematic book, as perhaps it should be. The difficulties I have identified here stem directly from the struggle to organize the wealth of material with which it concerns itself, and which, I would suggest, relate directly to its extremely ambitious scope. In spite of this, Chesser's research into cross-dressing in Australia does make interesting, at times even fascinating reading - and as another archival scholar, I certainly envy her the hours she has spent fruitfully gathering her impressive collection of archival materials.

Sharon Bickle is a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Centre for Women's Studies and Gender Research at Monash University. Her publications include *The Fowl and the Pussycat: Love Letters of Michael Field, 1875–1909*; *Michael Field and their World*, eds. Margaret Stetz and Cheryl Wilson; and articles in *Lifewriting Annual* and *Nineteenth Century Theatre and Film*.

Murdering Identities

Amanda Curtin - *The Sinkings*, Crawley, WA: University of Western Australia Press, 2008.

By Cheryl Jorgensen



The Sinkings is a work of fiction but opens with an actual historical event which precipitates the unravelling of several mysteries in this novel.

In 1882 human remains were found near a well five miles from Albany, Western Australia. An autopsy determined that they were those of a woman, yet the victim was identified by locals as Little Jock, a male sandalwood cutter and former convict.

More than a hundred years later, an amateur historian, Willa Sampson, is determined to discover the circumstances leading to the savage attack on Little Jock - and would also like to know how he had survived until then in a society which imposed inflexible sexual stereotypes upon its members. Willa's is not a disinterested quest, however, for she is suffering the grief and guilt associated with her own daughter's crisis of sexual identity. Nineteen-year-old Imogen has fled the family home and Willa knows that she has lost her daughter forever.

Feeling the need to uncover Little Jock's history in order to understand Imogen's predicament more fully, Willa travels to Glasgow, Belfast and England to research it. She does not seek out her daughter's whereabouts, however, because of a promise she has made her.

Little Jock's story begins in County Tyrone, Northern Ireland, where he was brought up by his grandmother as a girl-child. By 1847 the Famine has forced the nine-year-old into the poorhouse and great danger, for a stranger is stalking her with the intention of kidnapping her - in order to sell her either as a freak to a fair, or as a scientific curiosity to a university. Fortunately, however, she meets Mary Lunney, a kindly mother-of-seven who offers her the love and safety of a family, and who takes her to Glasgow with them, even though the Lunnays are suffering the same depredations as she. She becomes Patrick Lunney: in the first of many changes of name and identity.

Mary's husband and two of her children die of starvation on the way to Glasgow and, since conditions are hardly better than those in Ireland, Patrick takes to stealing to help feed his new family. This course of action leads him into a number of gaols and, ultimately, deportation to Australia where he takes the name 'Jack King' to avoid bringing shame upon Mary. The nickname 'Little Jock' becomes his moniker.

While we follow Little Jock's fortunes in the 1800s, the author regularly takes us back - or forward - into the twenty-first century. Here we witness the trauma Imogen endures when she finds out about the choices medical science has made on her behalf and inflicted upon her body from the time she was a tiny baby.

This is a moving, intricately-woven story which portrays something of the devastation of the Potato Famine and the exodus of Irish people to other lands; it poses questions about the most fundamental of human rights, our autonomy in relation to our own bodies. Taking the murder as a starting-point, Amanda Curtin cleverly investigates a subject which has, until recent times, been considered taboo: the problem of sexual identity amongst people born with reproductive organs that are not definitively male or female, and who may have ambiguous or misleading genitalia. This condition was once called “hermaphroditism”; today the term “intersex” is more generally used, with the medical label, “DSD”, or disorders of sex development. Statistically the frequency of intersex is between one in 2000 and one in 800 live births - making it as common as cystic fibrosis or Down’s syndrome.

Curtin has won various writing laurels including the University of Canberra National Short Story Award and the Katharine Susannah Prichard Short Fiction Award. This is her first novel.

Brisbane writer, Cheryl Jorgensen, has won several literary prizes for her fiction, including The National Bank Short Story prize for ‘Browning and the Red Spot Special’, the Dymocks/4BC Writing Award for her first crime novel in 1995, and the Fastbooks Award in 2004 for her Young Adult novel Morag Bane. She was sole runner-up in the Davitt Prize in 2004 for her third crime novel A Quality of Light and a runner-up in the National Book Council HarperCollins Fiction Award for her second, Tom Tiddler's Ground. Lately she has turned to writing nonfiction. The 'brook was published in 2004 and re-published as Brutal in 2006. The Taint was published in 2008.

Robo Sapiens to the Rescue

Jeanette Winterson - *The Stone Gods*, Camberwell: Penguin Group, 2007.

By Elizabeth Edwards



The Stone Gods is Jeanette Winterson's most recent novel. Since she is a publicly-acknowledged lesbian author, Winterson's novels are often only read in terms of their engagement with lesbian issues. Similarly, her novels have often been categorised as purely operating in the genre of magic-realism. Texts do not produce one authoritative meaning; they are open and allow for a myriad of possible interpretations when readers engage with the words on the page. A fully engaged reader will realise that Winterson has pushed the boundaries of genre in *The Stone Gods*. It is a polemical novel that deals with questions of femininity and naturalised homosexuality, whilst operating as a type of science fiction love story that delineates time and space, problematises colonisation and explores what it means to be human. *The Stone Gods* speaks with relevance on issues concerning today's world: global warming, depleted natural resources and rapidly advancing technology, and how these phenomena have the potential to affect the continuance of human existence.

Time in *The Stone Gods* is not linear. Through the novel's structure, Winterson explores the notion of the past's interaction with the present and future. A female protagonist, Billie Crusoe, exists in the four parts of the novel, all set in different time periods. Life is trapped in a continual cycle of destruction, as Billie and her society continue to repeat the mistakes of their past. It is as though humans, despite their best intentions, bring about their inevitable demise and the contamination of their planet. In this way, time seems to have a circular quality rather than being simply flat-planed.

Much of the novel is set on the planet Orbus, where humans have upset the environmental balance necessary for supporting human life. Hope for homo sapiens now lies with robo sapiens - robots capable of emulating human consciousness without emotion. Spike, an attractive female robo sapien has discovered a new planet, pristine and capable of supporting life – Planet Blue. It is now Spike and Billie's mission to stake out this new planet before the mass-relocation occurs. On their mission to re-direct an asteroid towards Planet Blue, Billie and Spike explore the boundaries between humans and robots and whether love can cross over such differences.

Winterson's text explores the impact that colonisation has upon both the minds of native inhabitants and their natural environment. Part II of *The Stone Gods* fictitiously describes James Cook's

explorations to Easter Island in 1774, where the character Billie Crusoe befriends a native, Spickers. Twenty-first century readers engaging with this text hold an appreciation of the devastation that the imperial movement brought upon the island; disease, slave raids as well as ecological collapse. Colonisation is not simply the act of taking possession of another's land; it is the complete destruction of another culture, language and systems of beliefs. It is through the character of Spickers that the reader gains an understanding of the infiltrating and indoctrinating nature of colonisation. While Spickers engages with the traditional rituals of his people in building stone idols, his existence as a colonised native is complicated by Western modes of belief: 'I saw at once it was a Bible box and, sure enough, inside were three Bibles; one written in Dutch, one in Spanish, and the King James' (129). A sense of inevitability pervades this text, as Billie once again engages in a perpetual cycle of colonisation and destruction - if not of an island or continent, then an entire planet. Winterson's intertextual engagement with Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, challenges earlier assumptions concerning colonisation and white superiority: 'My name's Friday,' he said. 'What's yours?' I said, 'Billy Crusoe' (188). In this scene Friday wasn't named by Crusoe and, thus, retained his identity as an autonomous individual. Winterson thereby undermines earlier literary assumptions concerning colonisation.

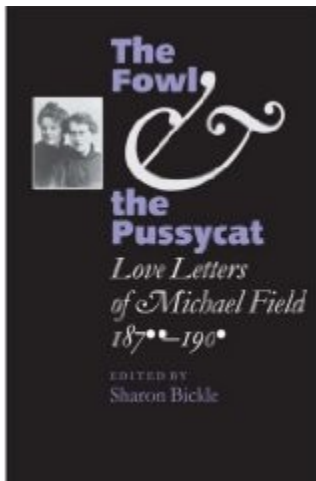
In *The Stone Gods*, Winterson destabilises assumptions concerning heterosexuality and gender. Throughout the novel, Billie and Spike engage in relations with women. Love, in *The Stone Gods* is exclusively represented through lesbian relationships and, by showing this, Winterson silences and marginalises heterosexual relations with men. Winterson also undermines traditional literary assumptions concerning heterosexuality, through intertextuality with Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, in Billie's description of Spike: 'It is a truth universally acknowledged that a robot in want of hands can use her mouth' (208). Through Winterson's carefully constructed language choices, the novel not only marginalizes heterosexuality but plays a role in the naturalisation of homosexuality: 'You're not straight are you?' (24). Interestingly, Winterson invokes questions of femininity and the role of women that are current in today's world, but places these concerns in a futuristic setting. A grim prospect for women is envisaged: 'The future of women is uncertain. We don't breed in the womb anymore, and if we aren't wanted for sex...' (26). It is the text's engagement with gender and the naturalisation of homosexuality that gives *The Stone Gods* its polemical edge.

Elizabeth Edwards is studying for an Arts/Law Combined degree at The University of Queensland

Poets and Lovers: a unique collaboration

Sharon Bickle (ed.) - *The Fowl & the Pussycat: Love Letters of Michael Field, 1876-1909*, Charlottesville, University of Virginia Press, 2008.

By Sylvia Martin



Many nineteenth and early twentieth-century women writers chose to publish under male pseudonyms to hide their gender – George Eliot, Henry Handel Richardson, Miles Franklin to name a few – but the nom de plume ‘Michael Field’ conceals a unique collaboration between two late-Victorian Englishwomen, Katharine Bradley (1846-1914) and her niece, Edith Cooper (1862-1913). Bradley’s early single-authored volume of poetry was published under the name Arran Leigh, a pseudonym that was extended in the women’s first collaborative drama to Arran and Isla Leigh. But in 1884 ‘Michael Field’ was born and became the pseudonym for the women’s remaining prolific output of poetry and verse dramas.

The later decades of the twentieth century saw renewed interest in ‘Michael Field’ by feminist and lesbian scholars, mostly because of the women’s intriguing private lives as ‘poets and lovers evermore’, as they wrote in one of their verses. Jeanette Foster’s pioneering work *Sex-Variant Women in Literature* in 1956 included ‘Michael Field’; Lillian Faderman placed the poets within her Romantic Friendship framework in 1981, which was contested by Chris White as asexual and ahistorical ten years later; while Emma Donoghue’s 1998 biographical study *We Are Michael Field* argued that the women were lesbian lovers. The writers’ journals and letters in the British Library have been the sources most consulted by scholars, but Sharon Bickle in her edition of 168 letters and annotated envelopes by Bradley and Cooper draws on a little-known collection in the Bodleian Library at the University of Oxford, supplemented by a small number of letters from the British Library and a few held in the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York.

These ‘love letters’ make for fascinating reading, providing new insight into Bradley and Cooper’s lives (particularly the crucial early period) and also into their methods of collaboration. Bickle’s scholarship is meticulous and awesome, in the true sense. The writers were highly-educated women for their time, studying at the new Bristol University College (one of the few institutions that accepted women as students) and their letters attest to their extraordinary scholarship, Bickle’s notes identifying the myriad of literary, biblical and historical allusions contained within them. Her detective skills are exhaustive, even to the inclusion of the note ‘Untraced’ when she occasionally fails to track down a source. Dating the letters was also a process of deduction and contextual knowledge as the women never dated their correspondence; some of the 168 are actually just envelopes annotated by the receiver and giving clues to when the letters were written.

Bradley and Cooper had many pet names for each other, but Bickle draws from two favourites – ‘All-Wise-Fowl’ for Katharine and variations of ‘Persian Puss’ for her niece, Edith – for the title of her

book, which, like the Victorians who loved displaying their literary skill in puns, alludes to Edward Lear's verse published just five years before the first date of the letters in the collection. The women's pet names indicate their relative positions within the relationship, with the wise fowl (usually referred to by Bradley as 'he') taking the role of guide and the pretty Persian puss the softer pupil, but one who was not immune to showing sharp claws, particularly as she became more confident of her own literary prowess and less in awe of her glamorous aunt.

The letters range from the women's early life before their collaboration when Edith was still an adolescent through to the years after Cooper's mother's death when the couple set up their 'married home' in Richmond. This enables the reader (with the editor's able assistance) to trace both the developments and shifts in their relationship and the development and manner of their collaboration.

Bradley and Cooper lived together as part of an extended family from the time Edith Cooper was a small child. During the younger woman's later adolescence the couple was often separated, Bickle suggests perhaps intentionally by Edith's parents. As the protestations of love in the letters grow ever stronger and more intense, the terms with which they address each other change, eventually settling into a pattern where Bradley is referred to as 'Dearest love, my Own husband' and Cooper as 'my wife'. The later letters become shorter and more functional as the women were able to spend more time together and it is in their joint journal, begun in 1888, that the poets explore their literary lives as Michael Field. These letters provide a rare and extended example of the workings of a late nineteenth-century same-sex relationship, revealing the importance of the language of literature and art as part of its currency. The 1880 correspondence - when Bradley is travelling in Italy and Edith is at home with her family in Bristol - contains many examples of female homoeroticism, one exchange occurring when Edith asks Katharine to kiss the statue of Ilaria in her tomb in Lucca Cathedral: 'Kiss the perfect woman at Lucca...I have sent a pilgrim-Kiss; may it reach you in time to be pressed by your lips on her shrine!' Katharine replies in her next letter: 'I bear on my lips the marble of Ilaria's brow!...I kissed her on the calm forehead, the tremulously sweet lips, the sweet round chin.'

The letters also reveal the operations of the literary collaboration between the poets, a process that Bickle suggests was 'a fluid one'. In a letter from another collection quoted by Bickle, Bradley and Cooper offer a description of their method to Havelock Ellis, detailing some sections as the work of one of the pair and other parts as 'perfect mosaic: we cross and interlace like a company of dancing summer flies'. It is apparent that if the collaboration started with the elder woman being the dominant partner, it grew to become one in which both writers contributed equally. In life, their relationship seems to have also been far from a stereotypically gendered hierarchy in spite of their loving naming of each other as 'husband' and 'wife' in the privacy of their letters. The metaphorical model of female fluidity familiar from the work of feminist theorists such as Irigaray could be productively deployed in a reading of these poets' letters. At one point, Edith Cooper, the 'Persian Puss', complains that the letter she is writing to her lover is stilted: 'I cannot write my love with this stiff unspontaneous pen. (Sharp mew!)

Bickle describes these late-Victorian poets as 'female urban flâneurs' (a term usually reserved for male aesthetes and observers) and the letters in this collection provide a rare treat for readers interested in contemporary accounts of life and art of the period. They describe intricately and at length theatrical performances and works of art as well as the people and places they visit. Katharine devotes two pages to describing Henry Irving's performance as Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*,

how when he curses his eyes roll ‘their irises clean away into his brain, and leaves the eye-balls – a glaze of malignity’. She writes about a production of a specially-devised version of Macbeth that is a vehicle for the great Adelaide Ristori as Lady Macbeth. Such accounts are a treasure trove for scholars and fascinating for the interested reader.

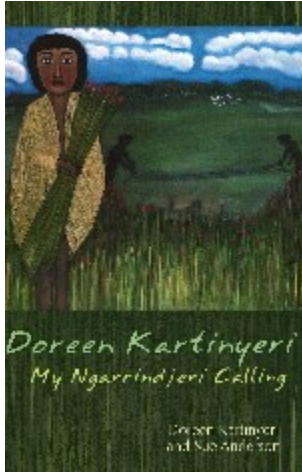
Sharon Bickle’s outstanding scholarly edition of these neglected letters about a unique writing collaboration that is intriguing and valuable on a variety of levels is a work of consummate detail. She provides an extensive introduction, copious notes, an appendix detailing ‘Textual Apparatus’ and a comprehensive bibliography. In a work of such density, my only request might have been for explanatory notes on biography and chronology to have been inserted between the letters to allow the reader to negotiate text and endnotes without having to constantly refer back to the biography in the Introduction.

Sylvia Martin is the author of *Passionate Friends: Mary Fullerton, Mabel Singleton and Miles Franklin* (2001) and *Ida Leeson: A Life. Not a Blue-stockings Lady* (2006), for which she was awarded the Magarey Medal for Biography 2008.

My Ngarrindjeri Calling

Doreen Kartinyeri and Sue Anderson - Doreen Kartinyeri: My Ngarrindjeri Calling, Canberra, ACT: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2008.

By Marie Porter



If any Australian doubts the injustices suffered by the Indigenous people of this continent, reading this book would make any such denial impossible to uphold.

Doreen Kartinyeri: My Ngarrindjeri Calling is a personal narrative jointly authored by Doreen Kartinyeri and Sue Anderson. The story is told from Kartinyeri's perspective as she explores 'my culture, my family, my people, my life'. Particularly important to her is knowledge of her people's ancient culture and ceremonies, her relationship to various members of her extended family and social justice for Aboriginal people.

Kartinyeri has to contend with death and loss from a very young age. When she was eight, she lost her sister who was seven. Her grief is deep, so deep that in her dreams she constantly re-enacts the sad event. The loss of her mother two years later after childbirth, and the consequent loss of this baby sister to an institution, are followed by the death of her first baby at seven months and the death of her beloved Nanna and father. Her ability to deal with such sadness, to rise above it, to continue to fight for justice for herself and those Indigenous people with whom she journeys, and to finally be employed as a researcher at a university, testifies to her determination, intelligence and strength.

Kartinyeri's experiences of loss on another level also affect her later family life. Her family and her extended family are constantly changing as various members are taken away by the white officials. She herself is institutionalised at ten years of age, a move she strongly resists, but finally has to accept. The legacy of her forced removal from her home leads to her rescuing of Aboriginal children who have nowhere to go, even while caring for her own family of nine. This generosity of spirit is similarly evident when she responds positively to the kindness of a white family who are her employers.

Her work as a university researcher allows her access to the records of children who were removed from their parents, the Stolen Generation, by order of the Protector appointed by the government to oversee Indigenous missions and settlements. This activity was frequently recorded in letters between various officials. Kartinyeri writes:

These letters were the official record of how Aboriginal people's lives and bodies were being controlled and it was a shock to be witness to them (124).

Such control coupled with the lack of adequate health services and a lack of racial equality resulted in much unnecessary trauma and grief.

The book is structured in two time periods. At the beginning of each Chapter there is a short account of what was occurring in the political battle for the building of the Hindmarsh Bridge. Kartinyeri was one of the Aboriginal women who were resisting the building of the bridge. The Chapter then returns to the narrating of Kartinyeri's lifestory. In this way attention is drawn to the continuing lack of understanding of Indigenous people's beliefs and way of life.

Anderson expresses her concern about the 'voice' in the book. She is aware that while the book is written with Kartinyeri as the narrator of the story, there are times when Anderson's own voice is evident. I did not find this occasional change of voice a problem, although some readers may.

I recommend *My Ngarrindjerri Calling* because it aids understanding of a vital part of Australian history, but more so because it is an interesting story of a strong woman of keen intelligence and sharp memory who made a valuable contribution to Indigenous history. She established the family history unit at the South Australian Museum, and was recognized as Person of the Year by NAIDOC in 2007 and by an Honorary Doctorate from the University of Adelaide. She is the sister of Doris Kartinyeri, author of *Kick the Tin* and a number of other works. Doreen Kartinyeri died in December 2007 at the age of 72.

Marie Porter has a PHD from the University of Queensland where she is a Research Associate in the Centre for Research on Women, Gender, Culture and Social Change. Her main fields of research are Motherhood and Mothering.

Australian Abroad: Negotiating Culture, Re-Locating Self

M.J. Hyland - How the Light Gets In. Australia: Penguin Books, 2003.

Review Article by Sanjukta Dasgupta

I thought that being in America, surrounded by wealth, the new air, the very idea of a fresh start, would obliterate all my fears. I thought I could change identities like a double agent.

Of the books by Australians that were entered for the Commonwealth Writers Prize 2004, M.J. Hyland's *How the Light Gets In* (2003), featured in the Best First Book shortlist of the Eurasia region, though it did not win the award. This debut novel left a lingering impression on the mind; a commendable feat when 103 books were entered from the Eurasia region in 2003.

The two other Australian books entered for the competition belonged to the South East Asia and South Pacific region of the Commonwealth and were once again by women writers. The Best Book and Best First Book regional winners of CWP 2004 went to *The Hamilton Case* by Michelle de Kretser and *Somewhere, Home* by Nada Awar Jarrar. Both writers located their novels outside Australia, specifically in Sri Lanka (or more accurately, the erstwhile Ceylon) and present day Lebanon respectively. But Hyland's novel *How the Light Gets In* focuses on Australian lower middle-class culture and the culture of alien spaces negotiated by the protagonist or persona, tracing thereby the dynamics of the local/global dichotomy. Hyland is an Australian resident, but was born to Irish parents who migrated to Australia in search of a better life. She had a difficult childhood with an abusive father and an impoverished family life, but she is now a lawyer as well as a writer.

In this connection, the cosmopolitan Australian woman writer who comes to mind is Christina Stead who left Australia, lived in the UK and the USA, and returned to Australia after about forty-six years. However, the history of Christina Stead being considered as non-Australian and denied Australia's most prestigious literary award, once again brings us to the endless debate about homes and homelands in the era of globalization and migration. The resemblances are obviously tenuous but at the same time such data vindicate the fact that negotiating multiple geographical and cultural locations has been an ongoing process for Australian writers throughout the twentieth century, resulting in many clashes of cultures, sometimes infected by pride and prejudice. But in the transnational environment, national and regional cultures are all in that immense crucible where each is represented as part of the whole, and the crucial absence of one leads to a severe sense of loss and reduction in quality and quantity. It is the harmony of heterogeneous congeniality that needs to be celebrated, not the tediousness of homogeneity that chokes many in order to establish a lustreless uniformity.

For Australians too, as perhaps in many other regions in the world, the twentieth century very deeply embedded in the psyche of the urban young an irrepressible desire to chase the American Dream that had replaced the Anglo Dream of the previous centuries when Britain was no longer the hegemonic power. The cultural variable is the wider penetrating power of the stronger economy that consumes less dominant cultures, as the consumers of these locations are overpowered by the consumerist

charisma of endless choice, the magnetism of capitalist economy.

The impact of America's popular culture is all pervasive - it echoes through the coconut plantations of Sri Lanka, the tea plantations of Darjeeling, the streets of Melbourne and Paris, and the towns of the United Kingdom. It is this ubiquitous presence that lures exchange students, as well as the Toefel, GRE and GMAT candidates, to crack the eligibility tests that provide the preliminary entry point to the land of dreams and opportunities.

M. J. Hyland initially wrote a short story about this American allure, entitled 'In a Prison of Wayward Exchange Students'. In an interview, she stated that she had not really planned to have a female protagonist, as such. The politics of gender was not her agenda, Hyland said.

I didn't set out to write about a teenage girl, it was mostly an accident. Lou started out as a male character and went through several incarnations. I had written a short story called 'In a Prison for Wayward Exchange Students' and the main character was a boy. Lou then grew out of that story because I wanted to tell the story of one of the exchange students and how he or she ended up in this prison. (Bibliofemme interview).

Hyland here asserts that the author's agenda gets transformed as the words are born on the page. It is this transmutation that Roland Barthes probably had in mind when he alerted readers to the construction of the fictional text and the author's inability to dominate the text through very subjective interventions when he observed, 'The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centers of culture' in his famous essay on the death of the author:

As used by Hyland in the title of her short story, the word 'prison' takes on a crucial significance on many levels. Ideally, exchange students are looked upon as cultural ambassadors negotiating the host culture and introducing the inmates of the host culture to the practices of the home culture, of which the exchange student is a representative. So, Louise Conner from Sydney, Australia, arrives in Chicago to live with her affluent American host family. Very precisely, the modest circumstances of the Australian teenager and the affluence of her temporary American 'home' are underscored by Hyland in two short passages:

No member of my family has ever been overseas. My mum (Sandra), my dad (Mick), and my two teenage sisters, (Erin and Leona), live squashed together in our three-bedroom flat...and the few places I have ever been with them did not involve visas, suitcases or aeroplanes. (6)

In chapter 2 Lou describes her American abode:

My new home is a suburban mansion: two storeys, wide, tall and white, with six, big white columns on the front porch and curtains clean as milk in the windows. (13)

The most devastating reflective statement in this debut novel about negotiating cultures is in the opening lines of Chapter 3, 'I have read that a sheep raised by dogs will eventually learn to chase cars. But how long does it take to learn the tricks of another animal? How long will I need to live with the Hardings before I unlearn the tricks of my own family?' (33). These questions open up debates about assimilation and acculturation that are becoming increasingly unavoidable in the

growing global environment, despite the fact that Hyland is not writing about a migrant person but an exchange scholar.

However, what troubles me is that, while Hyland came very close to a cross-cultural critiquing of the contrasts and similarities between the American and Australian culture, as a reader I felt the book was a case of missed opportunity. It is a missed opportunity for showcasing sameness and difference in American and Australian adolescents - who will obviously participate, in the next seventy years of the twenty-first century, in determining the shape of things to come. Is this absence in the text due to the fact that there are more similarities than differences between white teenagers, irrespective of their cultural location? It is apparent that there are more differences between teenagers of other colours and their white counterparts, though they may all be fitted out in Calvin Klein and DKNY creations.

Hyland skims over these issues with subtlety, without letting them take on the position of centrality in the text often observable in Asian American writing, and more specifically in Asian Indian fiction. Lou's rich American host parents, Henry and Margaret, are smart, sophisticated, upwardly mobile, middle-aged professionals, who invite an exchange student as a guest to sensitize their teenage children as well as themselves about people from other cultures. However, there are few exchanges between the teenagers or their friends in school, from which the true purpose of exchange students - to generate mutual understanding in future citizens - is achieved. So, Lou observes, 'Margaret and Henry are more cheerful towards me now that my S.A.T. scores are out, and I am officially in the top one percent of the country. This seems to prove that I can 'fit in' (192).

The American host parents are represented as possessing typical WASP superiority and snobbishness. Lou's unabashed exploitative and unemotional analysis of her host-mother Margaret is repeated often in the text and this culminates in the statement - 'What she wanted from me was the short-term experience of a quaint and foreign visitor. She does not want to be involved in changing somebody's life for good' (194). The Hardings hesitate when Lou asks them to support her stay in America as a permanent resident:

I'd rather die than go home. (183)

I don't want to go home. I want to know whether you can help me stay in America? (193)

So, Lou rests her hopes on her boyfriend Tom, who comes from the richest family in the neighbourhood and is also in love with Lou. Lou dreams of the possibility of moving into his house if the Hardings are unable to sponsor her stay in America even if his family supports the Ku Klux Klan: 'I am still going to ask if I can move in. I'll tell him what I think of bigots and racists after I have got a green card and I've got into a good college on a full scholarship' (194). Earlier in the novel Lou's plans had been: 'When school has finished and my scholarship ends, I'll move in with Tom's family and become a citizen' (167).

Lou tells James, her host-brother, about her deep sense of repulsion towards her own family, though there are occasions in the text that prove her desire to be loved by her mother and father and have a bonding with her sisters - 'I tell him that my real family is foul; that my sisters and parents are foul and that the whole point of my coming here was to purify myself and that I never want to see them again' (206).

It is deeply disturbing to sense the total alienation of a young teenager from her family, and home, and her obsessive desire to relocate in a strange location. But the sense of frustration, desperation, longing for affection, desire for surrogate parents and siblings have such a destructive impact on the intelligent, imaginative and obviously sensitive Australian teenager, that she gives into easy addictives such as gin and cigarettes, apart from becoming a petty pilferer of money and a borrower too. The cover of the novel shows the lower half of a freckled young female face, heavily lipsticked, with a lighted cigarette, between slightly parted lips, the lower section of the nose all that we see of the face. A face without eyes. A fine whiff of smoke rises from the burning cigarette. Debra Billson's cover design is remarkably postmodern, as it disturbs the reader and also allows the reader to construct the rest of Lou's face, by giving it deliberate anonymity, typical and yet exceptional.

But Lou's American dream is to be an achiever, a talented student with a full scholarship - this is the elusive light that lures her, this is the light that had tantalized her into pursuing academics that resulted in her distinction of being an exchange student in the USA. When the sordid mail from home arrives, reminding her of what she has escaped from, she tries to erase the links in her mind by mapping a new journey for herself - 'I will fulfil my enormous potential, learn a new word every day, read a novel every week and become the world's most impressive autodidact and polymath. I will go to university and live in student digs' (54). Chapter Four concludes with the possibility of a ray of hope in the form of a streak of light under the door. 'I lie down and look at the light coming in under the door and I am convinced that everything will be better from now on' (54).

Despite the fact that Lou is compelled by circumstances mostly of her own creation to experience the humiliation of being sent to a detention centre for wayward exchange students, she also becomes a victim of petty jealousy, and ultimately finds that she has to return to Sydney after all. Interestingly, the novel informs the reader of the existence of juvenile detention centres for wayward exchange students, who can either be taken up by another set of temporary host parents or have to return home before the completion of their grant term. In the centre, Lou meets exchange students from other parts of the world, such as Lishney from Russia whom she comes to love and Kris, a girl from Norway whom she likes enough to confide in. Such rapport with teenagers from other parts of the world who have different cultures and languages challenges the notion that cultural distance is synonymous with emotional distancing. Ironically, she fails to establish similar rapport with her American host brother and sister, James and Bridget.

So, although a situation verging on fantasy and wish fulfillment is constructed through a brilliant sequence of letter reading from home, Lou's life just moves on to another plane of experience as in the last page of the novel she once again notices a shaft of light under the door - 'There's a light on outside, in the hall, and it's coming in under the door' (317). The concluding line of the novel makes the much-hyped postmodern maxim of moving on seem scathingly ironic. The simple words very poignantly highlight the searing loneliness of the intelligent and sensitive affection-starved, troubled teenager's need for love and understanding - 'I'll watch people walking in the street below and wonder which of them I might like to follow home' (317).

Hyland's debut novel tracking Lou's journey towards a shaft of light, a glimmer of hope, maintains the stereotypes of the lure of stronger economies, of opportunities and dreams, as well as the sense of displacement and cultural shock that the exchange student experiences as an alien, who can exist in

the periphery of the host-home but never gain the status of the insider. The trauma of living in her own home in Sydney is replaced by the constant demand to adjust to the alien, sanitized ways of life of the Hardings (who, nonetheless, do not flinch while watching gang rape as family entertainment on television). Lou's need for a surrogate mother is repeatedly emphasized, as she tries to reach out to Margaret Harding and later Gertie, a staff member at the "prison" for wayward exchange students.

However, though Homi Bhabha's words in *Nation and Narration* resonate with the dream of a transnational dissemination of culture, on a macro level of the abstract and the concrete, 'America leads to Africa, the nations of Europe and Asia meet in Australia; the margins of the nation displace the center; the peoples of the periphery return to rewrite the history and fiction of the metropolis' (6), the journey seems to be longer and more complex in the context of the micropolitics of daily living, experienced by each sensitive individual in negotiating the mystery of life. This desire or disenchantment cuts across geography, race, colour, class and gender. The pathetic disillusionment of the young who crave for nurturing in dysfunctional families, is both a local and global phenomenon. Many young people make a desperate bid to survive by navigating to lands of opportunities only to learn the crucial lesson that searching for the way home is a relentless process of demystification, as one discovers and deconstructs one's dream of self by negotiating the Other and reconstructing the self.

Metro Toronto www.metronews.com/books/review.asp?ib=1695 [www.guardian.co.uk/review/story 0, 12084, 1221342.html](http://www.guardian.co.uk/review/story/0,12084,1221342.html) www.bibliofemme.interviews/hyland

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Fiona Foley's practice has presented a trenchant commentary on the past and present race relations of Australia's Indigenous peoples. Foley conceived the HHH series during an artist's residency in Queens, New York in 2004, when an exhibition entitled *Only Skin Deep* revealed to her a personal side to institutional racism.

This series draws on the value-laden iconography of the infamous Ku Klux Klan (KKK). Foley dresses her models in a reverse take on the KKK's symbolic white garb. African-American identity is celebrated, with coloured and patterned fabrics sourced from an African import outlet in Harlem. The look has changed, but the symbolic values remain and the overall effect is one of strength in unity. But if the title seems a playful parody on the KKK – 'HHH' stands for 'Hedonistic Honky Haters' – the assertiveness of the imagery puts all jokes aside.

In keeping with Klan history, the HHH models include women. Behind one HHH costume is Foley herself. A descendant of the Batjala people, who were forcibly removed from the island of Thoorgine (Fraser Island) in the early twentieth century, Foley's presence suggests that her focus is not simply on the fraught race relations of the United States, but extends to Australia.

Adapted from essay by Dr Prue Ahrens in *NEW: Selected Recent Acquisitions 2007–2008* (exhibition catalogue), UQ Art Museum, 2008.

Fiona Foley was born in 1964 in Maryborough Queensland and currently lives and works in Brisbane, Queensland. She is the recipient of a number of awards and grants and has exhibited widely, both nationally and internationally.