Heroic History and Public Spectacle

Sydney 1938

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Except where indicated in the text, this thesis is my own original work.

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Abstract

This thesis is about white Australian history and public spectacle. It analyses the representation of white colonisation—‘heroic history’—in elaborate public spectacles which were staged in Sydney in 1938 to celebrate the 150th anniversary of white settlement. The uses of history in these spectacles are discussed in terms of their structure, organisation, opposition, and relationship to a wider field of historical representation. The operations of two kinds of heroic history are examined in detail: visionary history, to do with the visionary anticipation of white Australia by singular historical individuals, notably Arthur Phillip; and pioneering history, concerned with the experience of settlers on the frontier.
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This thesis revises my earlier 'The Public Spectacle of a Disposable Past'. Among many other changes, a terminological one should be mentioned at the outset. In the earlier work I used the term 'heroic history' to describe the way in which Arthur Phillip (among other figures) has been regarded as a person who had imaginatively foreshadowed Australian history before it had happened. In this revision, 'heroic history' is a more general term: it refers not only to histories focussed upon the foresight of singular individuals, but also to other celebratory histories of white Australia, including those more collectively-minded accounts of pioneering. So 'heroic history' now indicates the kind of historical materials at issue in the thesis as a whole. The term 'visionary history' seems a better name for the particular form of heroic history which took Phillip as its central figure, and which can be usefully contrasted with 'pioneering history'. 'Heroic history' also replaces the term 'disposable past' in my title, in order to indicate more accurately the object of the inquiry.

Other changes can be briefly mentioned. The introduction has been substantially expanded into a chapter now called 'Heroic History': it now canvasses the problems explored in the thesis in a more wide-ranging way, and attempts to describe and justify the scope of the thesis more clearly than before. The discussion of the terms 'warrantability' and 'disposability' has been extended, as has my sketch of the wider 'historical field', which seeks to provide a clearer context and background for many of the works discussed later. I have also attempted to situate my work in relation to the various other ways in which academic historians have written about the non-academic past. Several comparatively minor points have been added to chapter two, which retains its central focus on the organisation of the 1938 anniversary.

The question of the precedents and political contexts of 1938's heroic history is addressed in chapter three, on visionary history. This is because I believe an understanding of Phillip's rôle in 1938 is crucial to understanding both the relationship between the 1938 anniversary and other celebrations and the politics of the 1938 event. Minor changes have been made to the analysis of pioneering history in chapter four. Finally, what was the conclusion has been considerably expanded. It now provides
a longer discussion of the changed representations of heroic history in 1988, underlining the differences between the bicentenary and the earlier anniversary.

A note on the illustrations: because much of this thesis deals with the visual representation of history, I use numerous pictures from films, books, pamphlets and newspapers in order to make points and illustrate arguments. There are also photographs taken recently of relevant monuments, and one photograph which was published in *Australians* 1938. Most of the photographs, however, are from two films which were made for the anniversary: *A Nation is Built* and *March to Nationhood*. The quality of these images, especially those from the latter film, leaves something to be desired, although they are accurate reproductions of individual frames from the films. They were all hand-printed from copy negatives of 16mm positive originals. Frames from *A Nation is Built* are sharper: Frank Hurley was a meticulous cinematographer. *March to Nationhood*, however, was edited from newsreel footage, and the fuzziness of frames from that film can be attributed to the inevitably lower production values of newsreel.

Many people have helped with the production of this thesis. The Department of History in the Research School of Social Sciences, Australian National University, generously supported the work and provided a congenial place in which to do it. I must thank particularly my supervisors, Professor K.S. Inglis and Dr A.W. Martin, my advisor, Dr Donald Denoon, and Dr F.B. Smith for their criticism and encouragement; and Mrs Beverly Gallina for her assistance with administrative matters. I must also thank the Humanities Research Centre at the A.N.U., where I finished the thesis, and Ms Jodi Parvey and Ms Wendy Antoniak for their help in particular.

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Early versions of parts of this thesis were presented to conferences and seminars: the Australian History and Film Conference in Brisbane, December 1987; the Australian Historical Association Conference in Sydney, February 1988; the History Department, R.S.S.S., at various times; the A.N.U. Women's History Group, in May 1987; and the Humanities Research Centre at the A.N.U. in October 1989. Certain sections were also published in *Australian Historical Studies* and the *Age Monthly Review*. I would like to thank those who commented on my work on these occasions.
Others have helped in all sorts of ways: encouraging the author, reading drafts, making suggestions, providing references, finding material, and preparing illustrations. I thank Karen Barfoot, Michael Bartos, Aletta Biersack, David Braddon-Mitchell, Nicholas Brown, Peter Cochrane, Douglas Craig, Joy Damousi, John Delaney, Jeannine Jacobson, Margaret Jolly, Sylvia Lawson, Denise Meredyth, Peter Taylor, Julia Thomas, Keith Thomas, Morgan Thomas and Nicholas Thomas.
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Heroic History

Edwin J. Brady, *Australia Unlimited*, Melbourne 1918
Settler societies see history differently; Australia is no exception. Unlike other nations, which trace their pasts beyond the earliest records, Australians have emphasized the novelty of their country's origins in modern European expansion. A familiar juxtaposition defines the land and its indigenous inhabitants as antique and the settler nation as modern. From this perspective the nation is seen not as an identity subsisting through long passages of time, but as an artefact of modern history, something made or in-the-making. The nation is recognised as an agent within the processes of imperial settlement, an agent of recent and rapid change.

Not only have Australian historians found the source of national history in European settlement; many of them have also regarded colonisation as a transformation that reveals the nature of the nation it produced. The early period of white settlement has been regarded as a special source of information about Australia—a key witness, as it were, in the continuing arguments about the country's character and destiny. 'The entire man is, so to speak, to be seen in the cradle of the child'. A neat biological metaphor, such as Alexis de Tocqueville's remark, has often served to express the importance of colonisation. Russel Ward used the phrase as an epigraph for *The Australian Legend* in 1958, and in the 1960s an ambitious American study of 'new societies' asserted it again: 'the Australian social adult is prefigured in the social embryo of yesteryear'. The repeated suggestion is that the truth about the nation may be found concentrated, like a genetic code, in its homunculus. In this way the past

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2 See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London 1983, p. 19. Patrick Wright criticises one such national past in *On Living in an Old Country*, London 1985; Fernand Braudel comprehensively embellishes another in *The Identity of France*. There he protests against those who see France as the outcome of recent history: 'As if history did not reach back into the mists of time! ... as if our villages were not already taking root in the soil in the third millenium before Christ, as if Gaul had not already traced the outline within which France would grow up....' *Volume I: History and Environment*, London 1988, pp. 19-20.
takes on a special importance in a ‘new’ country, precisely because of that country’s novelty.

Since the 1960s both the events and the received accounts of white settlement have been increasingly criticised, and historians have come to stress colonial violence and expropriation. They have also become more interested in social and cultural history and less interested in political and imperial history, with the result that colonial beginnings have lost some of their aura of singular importance. But not entirely: an early feminist history of Australia, Anne Summers’ *Damned Whores and God’s Police*, explained the ‘colonization’ of women in terms of the sexual and moral dynamics created at the beginning of white settlement.1 Among other large claims still made for the place of colonisation in Australian history: Henry Reynolds has sought to reinforce Aboriginal arguments for land rights with the observation that, because the issue goes back to ‘the first official day of white settlement’, these arguments have ‘the great weight of history’ behind them.2 Reynolds sets out to replace the bland notion of white ‘settlement’ with the stronger sense of a ‘revolution’, ‘one of the most prolonged, complete and successful’ bourgeois revolutions in the world.3

There are at least two possible arguments against Tocqueville’s emphasis on beginnings. Either the whole idea of an essential, constitutive truth about the nation can be rejected, or that revelation can be located in some other historical moment, such as the 1890s, or the First World War.4 The purpose of this study is not to take either position, but to analyse and illustrate some of the ways in which the Australian colonial transformation has been understood historically. I am interested in how white Australians have constructed histories of themselves from the original fact of colonisation, and in what has made those histories plausible. Critics frequently emphasize the flagrant omissions of the old, celebratory histories—Reynolds, for instance, points out the paltry treatment of Aborigines in Stephen Roberts’ foundational studies of land settlement.5 Yet the actual contents of those now discredited narratives are rarely examined. Historians such as Reynolds seek to create, from the beginning, a new interpretation of Australian history. Although he shares their high estimation of the importance of colonial settlement, his only interest in previous accounts is to show that they are false.

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1 Harmondsworth 1980 (1975), chs 8 and 9.
4 Richard White’s *Inventing Australia*, Sydney 1982, pursues the first course—’So we will never arrive at the “real” Australia.’ (p. x)—and quotes many examples of the second.
5 Op. cit., p. 188.
He, and other contemporary historians, have had little trouble doing so. But what ever made the old histories believable? What made them seem coherent, when they told only a fraction of the story? Roberts, in a footnote on page 403 of his *The Squatting Age in Australia*, noticed that 'the history of European relationships with the natives' was 'an important topic, crying for some general treatment'.

Why was that research not on the agenda?

To answer that, we need to look more closely at what was on the agenda; at the very assumptions about history which are now untenable but were not so when Roberts wrote in the twenties and thirties. Between-the-wars colonial history could be interpreted as expressing an entrenched, general racism, a social-darwinism differing only trivially from American and European examples. To do so however would avoid saying anything in particular about that history. My view is that that history should be considered not as an expression of general attitudes, but as a set of ideas specifically about the Australian nation and the ways and means of the white colonial transformation. So instead of asking what history did not attribute to Aborigines, this thesis examines what it did attribute to white settlers. It is a study of an antediluvian, heroic form of white Australian history. It asks what was the rationality of that heroic history—what made it work, if it did work, as a plausible accounting of the nation, and how did it work, in what kinds of cultural situations.

But how to approach these problems? What specific objects should be included in a treatment of heroic histories of colonisation? Obviously the issues raised so far call for a re-reading of writers such as Roberts, but this re-reading must be much more than a historiographical exercise. This is because the cultural networks and conditions which produced history in Roberts’ period had a particular form, which has utterly changed since. The expansion of public, especially higher, education after the second world war transformed history. Before that expansion, the subject of Australian history was not an academic discipline in its own right: there was no substantial, professionally qualified group of researchers, writers and teachers, and no institutional structure to support them. Without a developed category of 'professional history' there was no forced sense of 'amateur history', and nor were the conventions of language and style which now authorise serious history-writing as powerful as they have become.

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1 Melbourne 1935.

It was not that little history was done, or that Australian history was generally unknown before the post-war period. On the contrary, the range and intensity of the historical activity which went on in the absence of a historical profession can be emphasised. In the 1930s a considerable body of historical writing was produced, including detailed works of economic, political and administrative history, biography, and general history, commemorative volumes, and school textbooks. Many successful historical novels were written, such as those of G.B. Lancaster, Brian Penton and Xavier Herbert. The practice of history was closely associated with other forms of writing, and historians' interests coincided with those of other writers; histories and historical biographies were written by people who were novelists or journalists as much as historians. To take as examples two major figures in Australian historiography: C.E.W. Bean was a journalist who became a historian and continued to write journalism, and Marjorie Barnard trained as a historian, then turned to novels while continuing to write history.

It would be wrong to imagine this historical field in pastoral terms, as if it were free and open. History was not a profession, but it was shaped by institutions, among them the university. I will return to that; the point here is that for my purposes an exclusively historiographical narrative of significant works and influential teachers will not do. The historiographical issues of this period need to be addressed as part of an account of diverse activities and institutions. But which activities and institutions? A survey of the contemporary 'historical field'—the whole terrain of public historical representations—shows that it extended well beyond journalism, fiction and writing. A significant part of that terrain was given over to the display of history. Here there were successful films with Australian historical subjects; major public monuments commemorating the Great War; and a calendar of recurrent public rituals which were partly or wholly commemorative, including Anzac Day, May Day, Eight Hour or Labour Day, Remembrance Day, Anniversary Day and Empire Day.

Spectacles of this sort were important vehicles for history, not merely because they referred to past events, but because they sought to make a certain sense of those events by establishing their significance for imperial, or national, or political history.¹ A further distinctive form of public

spectacle, namely the anniversary celebration of original white settlement, was dedicated to the history of colonisation. The centenary of settlement had been celebrated in 1888; between the wars a cluster of elaborate state anniversaries were organised to celebrate original colonisation in the states of Western Australia (1929), Victoria (1934-5) and South Australia (1936-7). New South Wales presumed to stage ‘Australia’s one hundred and fiftieth anniversary celebrations’ in 1938, and this was the final, most elaborate and extended anniversary of the period.

Rather than narrate changing Australian attitudes to history, or survey, topic-by-topic, the people and organisations responsible for them, this inquiry is based on a more restricted analysis, using the manifestation of history in 1938 as a central point of reference and comparison. It is not, it should be emphasized, an inquiry into the general significance of the 1938 celebrations: it is specifically concerned with how they articulated heroic history.

Several things make the 1938 an interesting focus for such a study of heroic history. 1938 marks a convenient convergence in the historical field. The anniversary was more than re-enactments and parades, although spectacle was its major ingredient. Film-makers, historians, politicians, educators and writers of all kinds contributed to the event. Colonial history was not only widely displayed; its implications were also widely discussed, and its display was itself the subject of interpretation, adjudication and judgement. Because 1938 concentrated historical expressions of all kinds, an account of it necessarily takes in a variety of historical forms. Diachronically, it stands in a complex relationship with the historical spectacles of the thirties and before. 1938 was intended to be the culmination of those events. It was planned with the experience of the earlier State anniversaries in mind, but it was different from them: it attempted a much more developed form of historical spectacle than the ‘pageants of progress’ familiar in earlier events. A comparison with the other anniversaries may suggest why that was so.

The 1938 anniversary was also celebrated at a moment of great confidence in the legacy of white settlement. In an era of war, depression and political crisis, it was still possible to describe Australia as ‘the natural setting for the new Anglo-Saxon Empire under the Southern Cross’, and Sydney as ‘the second white city in the Empire’. Australians less inclined to imperial ambition looked almost as optimistically towards the fulfillment of

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1 The phrases are from the official film of the anniversary, Frank Hurley’s *A Nation is Built*. The film is discussed in chapter three below.
nationhood. Like imperial history, national history appeared to stretch, as if it were a clear, long line, from its foundation into a bright future. Yet both 'nation' and 'empire' were troublesome categories. Despite the assumption that it was 'Australia's' 150th anniversary that was being celebrated, and despite the familiar assertions that certain historical figures had 'made the nation', Australia was more usually regarded as a nation awaiting realization. Although 1938 claimed to be a national event, it was actually only seriously celebrated in the State of New South Wales. Whereas the main programme of the 1988 bicentenary was organised by the Federal Government, in 1938 the Commonwealth and the other States expressed no more than passing interest. The empire was also a contentious affair. Imperial economic and military security were articles of faith in electoral politics, but the substantive relations of imperial trade were endlessly debated and negotiated.

It turned out that events actually eroded both British imperialism and British-Australian nationalism. The second world war strengthened the powers of Australia's central government, exposed the vulnerabilities of the empire, and drew Australia close to the United States. In the post-war dispensation, a country that had prided itself on its Britishness vigorously pursued new economic alliances and set out to assimilate hundreds of thousands of people who were not British. Immigration eventually made possible the conception of a 'multicultural' nation, unthinkable before the war. Although Australian zenophobia was ascendant again during the 1940s and afterwards, confidence in white Australia was much nearer its zenith in 1938.

As I point out below, continuities certainly exist between the heroic colonial history of the antebellum and the national history now articulated in a 'multicultural' country embarking on a 'process of reconciliation' with its original inhabitants. But 1938's pride in triumphant colonisation was undiluted, and is interesting precisely because of that. We can begin to take the measure of that pride from one exemplary statement of it.

Pride and Expectation

In 1937, C.H. Bertie, a Fellow of the Royal Australian Historical Society, wrote a history of Australia which was an account of sixteen individual days. The first of these 'days of moment', as he called them, was 26 January 1788, the beginning of white settlement; the fifteenth was 25 April 1915, when Australian troops landed at Gallipoli. The days told the stories 'of the men who founded and pioneered our land, of men who moulded our
destinies, and men who fought to preserve our liberties'. Of all his days Bertie regarded 26 January as 'the most fateful in the history of Australia', because on this date at least two important things happened: not only was the nation 'born' in 1788; twenty years later, moreover, Governor Bligh was deposed. In fact this date appeared a third time in the history. This was 26 January 1938, the 150th anniversary of Bertie's first 'day of moment'. When he was writing, it was a day in the future, an imagined moment:

When the sun arises out of the sea on January the twenty-sixth, 1938, its rays will catch the the arch of a bridge spanning Sydney Harbour, the largest and widest arch bridge in the world. When the sun looks down on Sydney Cove, where it discovered, one hundred and fifty years before, one little vessel, it will illuminate floating palaces of 20,000 tons burden ... the rays of light will travel for fifteen miles over a city that has expanded beyond the shores of Sydney Cove. And in that city there dwells over a million and a quarter people.

Apart from providing a fascinating example of a history so structured around events that all connecting narrative has vanished, Days of Moment encapsulates a complex set of attitudes to the past. These attitudes, once widely held, are worth describing at the outset. The book's picture of Sydney is a utopian anticipation, drawing our attention to its faith in progress. Yet is also a disconcertingly mundane idea of progress, over-burdened with the measurement of time, size, weight and distance. Its confidence, furthermore, is combined with anxiety in some concluding lines of verse:

Thine have no tears in them for olden sorrow,
Thou hast no heartache for a ruined past;
From bright to-day to many a bright to-morrow
Shall be thy way, O first of lands and last!
God make us worthy now!...

In 1938's effusion of history-making, the Australians who celebrated the anniversary saw themselves as the worthy inheritors and outcomes of progress: they held up an image of a wealthy, egalitarian society within the British Empire. They admired the speed of their colonisation; how quickly they and their forebears had transformed a whole continent into a modern, democratic, affluent, white British country. Any 'olden sorrow'

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1 C.H. Bertie, Days of Moment in Australia: 1788-1938, Sydney 1937, p. 64. Days of Moment was published by a Sydney city jeweller.
2 Ibid., p. 64.
3 Ibid. The poem was by John Farrell, a nineteenth century radical nationalist.
notwithstanding, Australian readers could take pride in Bertie’s national history. They could also be confident in their pride, knowing their history with a certainty few could enjoy. George Mackaness, another historian associated with the Royal Australian Historical Society, claimed that ‘As the permanent home of a white race, Australia is in the exceptionally happy position that her history can be written authentically from the very first day of the first settlement.’\textsuperscript{1} Australians could be sure of their progress.

From this perspective, there was a general inability to imagine an Australian history that was not a celebration of white triumph, not a form of collective solipsism. History began with the arrival of white settlers. ‘What took place [before 1788] is geographical rather than human history’, wrote Peter Board in 1916.\textsuperscript{2} Even white Australians who admired Australian Aborigines and knew something about them thought that they were the disappearing victims of an irreversible decline begun by white occupation.\textsuperscript{3} Mackaness and Bertie did not even imagine that Aborigines were part of history: they were part of a primeval past, a wilderness that had been left behind by change. History was an abolition of this wilderness, and the ‘ruined past’ of convict settlement as well. These pasts—it was thought—had been mastered: there was no going back to them, no possibility of return. White Australians were the agents of this crucial transformation, but they did not share agency generally. The agents of history were a few singular heroes and the mass of ‘pioneers’, whose ‘labour and sacrifice’, others said, had ‘laid the foundation of a Great White Nation’.

Bertie’s book, however, was clearly not a celebration of this history for its own sake. Bertie addressed himself to the historical sensibilities of his readers, and by incorporating into his book the 1938 anniversary of 26 January he suggested a direct relationship between the citizens of the present and the heroes of the past. To those heroes, he wrote, ‘we owe the debt of remembrance, for it is due to them that the land we live in is a land of liberty and prosperity.’\textsuperscript{4} The purpose of his book, it seems, was to account for this debt.

Bertie’s thinking here reveals something about the historical field in which he worked. For reasons which he did not make specific, he regarded the putative day of remembrance as a day of moment itself, just as other

\textsuperscript{1} Admiral Arthur Phillip, Founder of New South Wales 1738-1814, Sydney 1937, p. ix.
\textsuperscript{2} Loc. cit., p. 291.
\textsuperscript{4} Op. cit., p. 64.
elaborate anniversaries were conventionally described by participants and reporters as 'historic' occasions. Although these anniversaries were clearly commemorations of historical events, this use of 'historic' was capacious, apparently signifying the rarity and festivity of such occasions and their promise of renewal, as well as their attention to events in the past. Distinctions between these senses of history were not clearly made by contemporaries, as Bertie did not clearly distinguish between a 'day of remembrance' and a 'day of moment'. The distinction professional historians characteristically make in their use of the word 'history'—the distinction between the past and accounts of the past—did not operate here. Bertie wanted to influence his readers' response to 1938; he wanted his citizens of the present to understand and to acknowledge what they owed to the past.

Bertie and Mackaness manifest a version of Australian history unlike any currently tenable account. My reading of them suggests that this difference is not simply the result of a now out-dated view of which subjects were historically important and which were not. There are certain more or less explicit assumptions in their writing, all apparently to do with establishing the white history and identity of the nation. These are: the authenticity of Australian historical knowledge; the abolition of the past by history; the engagement with the wider field of history, which may not have been fully distinguished from past events; and the strong acknowledgement of ties between present-day Australians to their past. Most interestingly, there are also particular concepts of historical agency attached to 'the men who founded and pioneered our land, [the] men who moulded its destinies, and [the] men who fought to preserve its liberties'.

This study deals with these assumptions and concepts in two long chapters, each concerned with a distinctive variety of heroic history. These chapters present, in effect, alternative conceptualisations of the white transformation of Australia. One is about the 'visionary history' of the singular individuals who 'moulded destinies' through the force of imagination, and the other addresses 'pioneering history', concerned with the experience of collective nation-building on the frontier. The distinction is between histories about 'vision' and histories about 'action'. This is no doubt too simple a division of historical labour, but it was an implicit—and occasionally explicit—juxtaposition of capacities in heroic history. Some historical agents were credited with foreseeing the transformation of Australia and some with the actual labour of transformation.

These chapters review earlier treatments of visionary and pioneering histories, including the celebrations which preceded 1938. They work from public representations of history, referring to a wide range of other history-telling material, including films, books, pamphlets, newspapers,
magazines, statuary and posters. They also use a considerable body of official and unofficial papers which has passed from the New South Wales Premier’s Department into the state archives. This material provides an invaluable guide to the organisation and management of the anniversary. Both chapters also have a similar structure: they discuss the historical concepts and their contents; they attend to public spectacles which depended on them; they take up a single text for more detailed analysis; and they explore alternative and oppositional formulations. The first of these long chapters looks in particular at relations between the 1938 celebrations and earlier ones, and at the wider context of the heroic history that was portrayed.

A shorter prefatory chapter aims to clear the ground with an account of the organisation of events, and a concluding one points to some continuities and differences between the histories examined here and contemporary expressions, especially those made at the time of Australia’s 1988 bicentenary. The conclusion does not summarize or restate the positions taken as a whole, since those tasks are performed fairly consistently in the body of the work itself. The assumptions about history which can be gleaned from Bertie’s and Mackaness’s writing are taken up throughout the arguments that follow, not because their work was especially distinguished, but because some of their premisses were widely shared.

More needs to be said before we go on to those arguments. A further description of the ‘historical field’ will make later references clearer, and some remarks on the broad academic interests of ‘public history’ will help to situate this inquiry and define its scope. Before turning to these issues, however, there is the more immediate question of vocabulary, of finding useful expressions for the consideration of these peculiar heroic histories. If they are as different from currently circulated versions of Australian history as I have suggested, then it is particularly important that we have the words to describe what those earlier histories do. We need words which will help us interpret heroic histories in such a way as to take account of the differences between them and later forms. I speak below of the ‘warrantability’ and ‘disposability’ of heroic history, for reasons which need to be made clear.

**Vocabulary**

To begin with warrantability. For readers now, Mackaness’s confident assertion of historical authenticity can only seem ironic. His certainties of race and permanence have proved so impermanent that they might well exemplify scholarly wrong-headedness. It would be easy to show how, despite his confidence in authentic white history, Mackaness and others
were frequently wrong about the colonial past. The sceptical conclusion would follow that the outstanding feature of heroic history is its falsity, and that this falsity was only heightened in the 1938 anniversary. 1938 would become a salutary example of the thin ice supporting all claims to historical authenticity.

Given all this, another question is possible—if Mackaness’s history was authentic, how would it have been so? Asking this question enables us to pose a specific problem which is not primarily an issue of authenticity. Rather it follows from the problem raised already, the problem of understanding white triumphalist histories in the first place. We need to understand the mechanics of how Mackaness’s statement might once have made sense; how, for example, the expectation expressed in the first part of it could be so closely linked to its main assertion about historical knowledge. To comprehend this problem we need to look into those concepts and conventions which actually governed representations of the past. In other words, we need an account of what made history plausible, or ‘warrantable’.

The usefulness of speaking about ‘the warrantability of history’ is simply that it helps direct discussion: it directs it away from the anachronistic authentication (or otherwise) of historical spectacles, and it directs it towards the more interesting problem of explaining their conceptual underpinning. For example: an account of the warrantability of a re-enactment of Arthur Phillip’s landing (such as chapter three provides) necessarily brings to bear contextual issues, such as contemporary ideas about visionary heroism, whereas an account of the authenticity of such a re-enactment need only compare it with the ‘original’ event to which it refers. This is not, of course, to exclude contemporary judgements of authenticity or inauthenticity from discussion; my approach seeks a context for such judgements. Speaking of the ‘warrantability’ of historical representations assumes that they are produced within conventions of truthfulness, and can therefore be interpreted as expressions of belief. The problem is to work out what conventions, or mixture of conventions, shaped the histories in question. Here there is no reason to assume that competing conventions of truthfulness cannot be at work. That was indeed the case in 1938, as chapter two describes. What is required is an analysis which, at some point at least, takes representations at face value, in order to take them seriously.¹

To turn to the 'disposability' of the past, a word borrowed from Reinhart Koselleck's *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*. I use it only incidentally to mean the rejection, or 'disposal', of aspects of the past in some histories. It generally refers to the way in which history may be conceived as 'subject to the disposition', or 'at the disposal' of people, to do with as they choose. Thus in 1938 writers of histories and organisers of public historical events decided what to do with the past, how to present it, and what to present. This was not all that they were doing, however. As organisers and contributors to a 'day of moment', they were not concerned solely with accounts of the past. They were also seeking to transform their own culture and society in the present. As they were arranging and adapting the past, they were also thinking about the future. I will give one example here: before the celebrations began, the *Sydney Morning Herald* published an editorial on 'The Making of a Nation', which includes the following argument:

The pioneering days are ended. ... But the task of making a nation is far from complete. As a people we still lack spiritual coherence. ... Our tenure of this great country is less secure than it was, and is likely in the future to depend not so much upon title deeds as upon our ability to populate, develop and hold it. Only a virile, unified and courageous people can hope to face with success the tasks which lie before Australia. The end of 150 years must not find us at ease in Zion. We must go forward, facing with energy as well as confidence the challenge of the future.

Just as the past is done with, the *Herald* implied, so we must move on from our current situation, and our understanding of history will help us to do so. Here the 'disposability of the past' is closely linked with the 'disposability of the present'. The present has a historical significance and the past has a contemporary significance. In this context the scholarly historian's familiar dichotomy between history as an account of the past and history as what really happened is anachronistic.

Why use the word 'disposable' here? I use it instead of the frequently used phrases 'making' or 'constructing' history because it points more clearly towards the contingency and ambiguity of history-telling. If a person 'makes history' he or she may be regarded as the origin of that transformation: history becomes an artefact of the present. If on the other

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2 24 January, p. 12.
Hand we say a person has history 'at their disposal' there is no such implication; instead, we are recognising that history is something that people use, but rarely invent. Of course it is possible to discuss the 'making' of history with exactly these considerations in mind, as Koselleck himself does. In choosing to speak about 'disposability' I am not introducing an alternative concept, but attempting to distance my analysis from the relativism and voluntarism which often seem to enter accounts of the 'making' or 'constructing' of histories, as if histories were produced at whim. It is too easy to talk about 'constructed' histories as if they were constructed in an eternal present tense outside history, as if the past was an endlessly manipulable symbolic resource, and as if the cultural production at issue was not itself an activity within history, informed by received ideas and subject to constraints.\(^1\) To take one example which is pertinent to this study, a recent analysis of Australian popular culture takes Kings Park in Perth as 'a masterpiece of ideology' which weaves 'complex messages' 'so unbtrusively that users of the park almost stumble on them'.\(^2\) One of the sources of this ideology is a garden dedicated to the memory of women pioneers. The authors write that

> The memorial fountain is a response to progressive feminist histories, which have forced academic historians to recognise the role of women in Australian history and social life. At the same time it uses this concession to neutralise the even more disturbing fact of white expropriation of the land, carried out by a group of whites who included soldiers, missionaries and government officials as well as 'settlers', male and female.\(^3\)

Here the memorial garden is understood as an artefact of the present, but the effect of this heuristic is to make the object unintelligible, because it is too readily interpreted as a signifier of something different: 'progressive feminist histories'. The memorial's origins can then only be roughly specified, its historical propositions obscured, and its purpose mistaken. The reference to 'progressive feminist histories' clouds the memorial's place in a long line of historical thought specifically about pioneering, which includes but is not defined by progressive feminist concerns. Without anticipating the discussion of pioneering histories in chapter four, these histories assert much more than the mere 'recognition of the

\(^1\) For a criticism of such a conception of the past, see Arjun Appadurai, 'The Past as a Scarce Resource', *Man* (N.S.), vol. 16 (1981), pp. 201-219. Maurice Halbwachs' *The Collective Memory*, New York 1981, may be cited as a strong statement of the 'artefact of the present' position.


\(^3\) *Ibid.*
role of women’. They propose definite arguments about white settlement, not in order to ‘neutralise’ the ‘disturbing’ facts, but to underline their importance within an explanation of Western Australian development. In other words, the memorial fountain seeks to dispose of the past: it does not avoid it. Our attention has to be directed at how it attempts to do so, and this must involve looking at how its explanation of historical change works, what it attributes to the pioneer women of the past, and what it was designed to convey in the present.

Speaking of the disposability of history has a further advantage. It draws our attention to the relations which are conceived between pasts, presents and futures more clearly than the alternative phrase ‘making histories’. A disposable history is not an assortment of past events, nor a narrative account of them; it is a history which must somehow open up ‘social and political planes for planful activity that point to the future’; the ‘space of experience’ and the ‘horizon of expectation’ as Koselleck calls them. This space of action where history is said to be foreseen and finally produced is dependent on a historical consciousness, a reflexive ‘history that is history only to the extent that it is recognised’. The crucial feature of historical time in the modern world, according to Koselleck, is that ‘the difference between experience and expectation becomes increasingly enlarged’. These differences make events like elaborate state anniversaries, which can be located in a past present, that is a world in the present tense which historians can reconstruct from our past tense, but also that they articulate past futures and past pasts. They render accessible spaces of experience which have since been closed or re-zoned, and they describe horizons of expectation which have long disappeared.

The idea that history is disposable is, as Koselleck explains, itself a historical concept which emerged in the European transition to modernity, the period Koselleck calls the ‘saddle-period’. He argues that it crucially depended on the notion of a general, singular human history, replacing multiple, distinct histories of particular people or things subject to fate or Providence. Futures Past is an outstanding account of the origins of a distinctively modern historical experience, but one of its difficulties is its association of modernity in general with a single ‘horizon of expectation’. Koselleck pays little attention to the possibility of competing

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4 As J.P. Minson points out in his unpublished article ‘Conceptual History and Modern German Social Thought’, p. 6. All of Minson’s article has been very useful.
disposable pasts or 'horizons of expectation' which cannot be derived from Enlightenment historical and philosophical texts. Attention to the elaborate displays of Australian public spectacle—re-enactments, pageants, monuments, films—discloses a kind of history which was most definitely not the history of a universal 'collective singular'.

The Historical Field

According to contemporaries, however, the mid-twentieth century Australian historical consciousness was remarkably deficient. The writer Nettie Palmer, for example, was troubled by the absence of a general appreciation of the past. Her published diary contains her response to the unveiling of a statue to George Higinbotham, in November 1937:

But the whole affair makes me wonder if there isn’t some essential lack in us, something that keeps our life from having meaning and depth—interest in our past, reverence for those who have shown outstanding qualities of mind or spirit. When we look back it is on great empty spaces, the significant dead have no memorials; the few statues in our parks are mainly of forgotten grandees and kings. It must be because we have no sense of ourselves as a people, with a yesterday and a tomorrow. I can’t help remembering that little fishing village in Brittany... on some rock rising from a wheatfield a bronze plaque, in memory of a local poet or hero. How these simple memorials added another dimension to the day-to-day life of the village!1

The Sydney Morning Herald’s editorial ‘The Making of a Nation’ argued that:

It cannot be said that we are a historically-minded people. Our story has been brief, as the histories of nations go, and it has been relatively undramatic: the conquest of a continent has necessitated no battles other than the ceaseless struggle to subdue the forces of Nature. The Stone Age people whom we have dispossessed fell back, not bloodlessly it is true, but with hardly more than a gesture of resistance before the advance of a civilisation unable to assimilate them; and, although our armies have fought heroically abroad, no foreign invader has ever menaced

1 Nettie Palmer, Fourteen Years, Melbourne 1948, pp. 240-1.
Heroic History

our shores. Happy the country whose history is so slight!
But a nation so young and so fortunate is apt to forget the
debt which is owed to those who pioneered this land, who
broke the trails along which we pass in comparative ease
to-day.¹

All the more apt, then, to remember and remind. Neither statement
should be taken at face value: the editorial appeared on the eve of a
sustained celebration of ‘those who pioneered’, and Palmer’s observations
were made towards the end of a period of energetic memorial-building,
precisely for the significant dead, in parks and open spaces throughout
Australia.² Both call for more history by asserting the lack of it, but what
they suggest is not that absence but its opposite: a wide interest in history
and a strong belief in its importance. History was on the agenda. Palmer’s
diary and the Herald’s editorial exemplify a recurrent argument in
Australian cultural commentary, that the nation was incomplete because
of an incomplete national sensibility among its people. When W.K.
Hancock energetically calculated the shortcomings of Australian
‘civilisation’ in 1930, he argued along the same lines: nationhood required
not only the political unity achieved with Federation, but also a ‘spiritual
achievement’. Australians, ‘unmindful of the past’, failed by this measure.
They ‘had not yet come of age’.³

M. Barnard Eldershaw (the name used by the writers Marjorie Barnard
and Flora Eldershaw) provided a stark formula for both the nation¬
making project and history’s central rôle within it in their book My
Australia. ‘Culture is the image in which man and his environment are
brought together’, they wrote. ‘It is the mirror held to life, and man, walled
into his own brain, cannot see himself except in this mirror. We cannot be
a nation until we conceive ourselves as a nation, and we cannot possess
anything until we have passed it through our imagination.’⁴ For them, as
with so many others, the ‘possession’ of the continent was the central
theme of its history. And this history was incomplete, because Australian
culture was not yet realised. Australians had not entirely disposed of the
past they had inherited. Barnard Eldershaw sought a historically self¬
conscious national sensibility. They sought with their ideal image a
natural and direct reflection between people and national culture.

¹ 24 January 1938, p. 12.
² See K.S.Inglis, ‘Men,Women and War Memorials: Anzac Australia’, Daedalus, Fall 1987,
pp. 35-59.
³ Australia, Brisbane 1962 (first published London 1930), p. 244.
This agenda is rather more dramatic than Bertie’s modest hope for a popular acknowledgement of the present’s debts to the past. Yet it is clear that the promotion of a certain sensibility—an awareness of history—is a characteristic feature of the historical field in this period, even if Bertie and Barnard Eldershaw conceived of this sensibility quite differently. Different institutions shaped their thinking about history: Bertie was a senior and very active member of the Royal Australian Historical Society, whereas Barnard Eldershaw were strongly influenced by George Arnold Wood, who was Challis Professor of History at the University of Sydney from 1891 to 1928. It is worth saying something more about these influences, since Wood’s ideas and the Society’s actions are important in the story below. In particular, there are interesting differences in how Wood and the Society approached the development of a public historical sensibility.

Bertie was Sydney’s City Librarian from 1909 to 1939.¹ He enjoyed a reputation as the foremost authority on ‘old Sydney’, and contributed articles to the Society’s Journal on such subjects as Matthew Flinders and early street names. Before joining in 1909 he had collected match-box tops, cigarette cards and shells, and the methodical, acquisitive enthusiasm of the serious collector characterised his approach to historical information. Bertie’s concentration on the facts of early settlement exemplifies the Society’s approach to history. ‘Spade-work’ was Stephen Roberts’ description of the Journal’s contribution to what he called ‘this, the initial, period of our national historical research’. ‘You have achieved the greatest body of preliminary research in Australia’, he said at the opening of the Society’s ‘History House’ in 1941.²

According to Roberts, this research had a ‘pioneering’ function; ‘really interpretive histories of Australia’ were a job for the future. This rationale was exactly what was envisaged for the Society by the Sydney Morning Herald, which was instrumental in its foundation in 1900. A Herald editorial published in that year foresaw that ‘An historical society would have the effect of stimulating the habit of research. It would accumulate a mass of detail from which the historian of the future would derive much useful information’.³ Yet Roberts also made some telling points about the limits of the Society’s interests. He accepted the ‘romance and colourfulness’ of the early colonial period, but urged research on the later nineteenth century, ‘a fundamentally important epoch’. The suggestion

² Ibid., vol. 27, part 1, 1941, p. 9.
³ 22 October, 1900.
was reinforced by a professorial assurance: 'I am sure that the superficial statement that [this epoch] is dull will no longer apply when the student gets down to it'.¹ He also called for 'a widening of scope' in regional terms, proposing both a more national perspective, so as to reflect properly the Society's name, and more work on Pacific history, so as to take advantage of the material available in the Mitchell Library in Sydney.²

These remarks indicate what was beyond the Society's sphere, but little enough about what it actually did. In fact it did much more than merely accumulate information in the Journal. The Society staged several large exhibitions of Australian historical artefacts in 1920, 1922 and 1938; agitated for and almost succeeded in establishing a public historical museum; collected, edited and published the reminiscences of pioneers in rural New South Wales; publicised old place names; placed tablets on numerous historical sites; and collected historical papers, objects and photographs. This programme for disseminating historical knowledge clearly distinguishes the Society from the old and exclusive clubs of pioneers and their descendants. Organisations such as the Australasian Pioneers' Club restricted their membership and activities to a small group of people who prided themselves on their familial connections with early settlers. Although the Society celebrated pioneering, just as it celebrated early governors and explorers, and although it was flattered to be called a 'pioneer' of scholarship, its active membership was not in old families but in public institutions—such as libraries, schools, and government departments—and its objective was not private genealogy but public education. This is most obvious in its attention to schools. The Society strongly asserted the place of Australian history in the syllabus, sponsoring various prizes for essays and debates, donating its publications to school libraries and defending the status of Australian history as a high school examination subject.³ Its connections with the New South Wales Department of Education were personal as well as institutional; Karl Cramp, a Secretary and President for many years, was a school Inspector and the author of several school textbooks. It was through his efforts that

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¹ Loc. cit., p. 10. See also D.I. McDonald's comments made in 1966: 'the same careful study has not been extended to the twentieth century... contributors... realize that there is so much work still to be done before tackling more recent times'. 'Sixty Years of Scholarship: The Journal of the Society, 1906-1966', *Ibid.*, vol. 52, part 1, 1966, p. 71.


the Department donated office space to the Society, in addition to its usual government grant.¹

The Society represents one strand of public historical education. Although it published his work, George Arnold Wood pursued a different programme, equally focussed on public education, equally influential, yet more ambitious and more critical.² Wood published in the Journal and supported the Society's work because he shared its interest in exploration and settlement, but his general concern was with the politics of empire, in the past and present. Wood was a liberal nonconformist and self-described 'Englishman Australianate'. He opposed the Boer War and was censured by Sydney University's Senate for doing so. Far from being an anti-imperialist, he believed in the possibility of a progressive, liberal empire, based on liberty instead of militarism. Such an empire, he thought in 1920, would reconcile Australia and Britain, creating 'a community of spirit and faith', 'one great fruit of the victory of democracy in Britain'.³ Here Australia's colonial history was a source of hope and faith: it showed how a convict prison could 'grow into a community of free citizens, living under civil institutions, and claiming British rights'.⁴ Whereas the Society was preoccupied with charting the incremental nation- and empire-building achievements of a succession of governors and explorers—its most extended debate was about the exact location of Phillip's landing⁵—for Wood the origins and the consequences of the convict system constituted the central subject of colonial history. It was a field for social and political interpretation, and then for critical moral judgement.⁶

The value of colonial history, from this perspective, was as an example to the present: its final importance was not inherent but lay in its demonstration of the possibility of progressive change. Wood's ultimate focus was on the historical awareness of the present, and on how that awareness should contribute to his 'community of spirit and faith'. For him the main point of teaching was to build that historical awareness into the sensibility of the present. Or, as he put it in his inaugural lecture, 'the purpose of the study of history is to enable the student in his turn to make

¹ K.R.Cramp, 'Twenty-Five Years of Progress', loc. cit., p. 168.
² On Wood's influence as an educator, see R.M. Crawford, 'A Bit of a Rebel': The Life and Work of George Arnold Wood, Sydney 1975, pp. ix-x and throughout.
⁵ See A.G. Foster, Early Sydney, Sydney 1920, including Wood's preface, pp. 1-5.
history, and history which it will be worth the while of future generations to study. ... The great end of education was not the training of learned students, but the making of good men and good citizens'.¹ Such an education should not be limited to university students; Wood often taught 'extension courses', and was an active supporter of the Workers' Educational Association and the Teachers' Association. He was the first Sydney University professor to give a series of lectures at Trades Hall, where, according to R.M. Crawford, 'he made no distinction between his audience of trade-unionists and his university students, either in the level of scholarship and argument or in the sense of commitment to liberty and justice'.²

Wood's ideas had a considerable impact on historical debate before the second world war, and on critical and oppositional arguments especially. The historical spectacles of that decade invoked empire, and did so in circumstances which made Wood's skeptical anti-militarism pertinent. As for the Royal Australian Historical Society, it—or rather the forceful Karl Cramp—was directly involved in planning the 1938 celebrations. Spectacle of that kind was, to be sure, removed from the Society’s usual promotion of a popular historical sensibility. The pedagogic techniques of the exhibition, the school debate, the excursion or the essay could not simply be translated into a mass re-enactment designed in collaboration with the film industry. Yet historical spectacle was also rhetorical; it was intended not only to entertain but also to impress its audience with a meaningful story about the nation's past. The anniversary was, in the end, given the credit for enlarging Australians’ 'sense of history'. Although we cannot know the degree to which audiences actually were impressed, there is no doubt that they were an important part of the spectacles they observed. Media reports of public spectacles almost always emphasized the responses of the crowds. In 1938 newspapers devoted headlines to the size of crowds, usually proclaiming their pleasurable involvement in events. The Melbourne Argus, despite being comparatively dispassionate on the subject of the Sydney celebrations, reported 'frenzied cheering' and 'excited applause' on 26 January.³

In that they invariably attracted large numbers of people, the state anniversaries of the thirties were certainly popular occasions. What that popularity meant was another matter. The 1930s were years of scarcity for most Australians: high unemployment and widespread poverty prevailed throughout the decade. Yet elaborate commemorative celebrations were expensive, and they represented Australia as a wealthy country, attractive

¹ Quoted in R.M. Crawford, op. cit., p. 132.
² Ibid., p. 255.
to tourists and business. There was therefore a politics associated with popular approval and participation in celebrations: it was most important that these were seen to be events arranged for the general benefit, rather than for those privileged few who were invited to lavish state banquets. Something of the same difficulty arose during the 1888 centenary, also a celebration in tough times. In 1888 food packages were distributed to the poor: such charity was necessary if lengthy dinners for notable citizens and visitors were to be justified. But the effect of this was to draw attention to Sydney's encroaching and decidedly unfestive poverty. In 1938 food was again given to the poor. The events of that year, however, were much more to do with the public display of history than had been the case fifty years earlier. Organisers staged celebrations of history which were also dramatic representations of history. The success of the anniversary depended on a positive popular response to spectacle. Yet what form might a popular national or imperial history take, in a country still seen as unusually egalitarian? The question is taken up in the arguments below.

Public History

Historical spectacles and commemorative celebrations could well be regarded as forms of 'public history', to use a recent academic term. I close this introductory chapter with some comments on the ways in which academic historians have approached non-academic histories, and on the historiographical background to this study. Although a considerable body of relevant and useful work exists—much of the Australian material is used and referred to in the course of the discussions below—problems arise with the groupings of material which historians use to distinguish between what is academic and what is not. Non-academic accounts of the past are more likely to enter into academic historical consideration when they are seen as something other than history, such as 'collective memory' or 'tradition', recent enthusiasms for historians, or as 'legend', an older topic in Australian historiography at least. The materials discussed in this study, however, insist upon their status as 'history'. Not only do they deal with the most conventional historical themes, namely empire-, nation- and state-building, but they also claim to be much more than representations of the past: they assert a forceful relevance to their present. They cannot be understood as expressions of memory or tradition, yet those are the categories which, in contradistinction to history, have attracted most attention from historians—witness the popularity of

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‘invented traditions’ among them since Hobsbawm and Ranger’s collection appeared in 1983.¹

For example: Pierre Nora, the editor of the seven-volume Les Lieux de Mémoire—certainly the most exhaustive study of collective memory anywhere—places memory and history in ‘fundamental opposition’. For Nora memory is ‘life’, a ‘perpetually active phenomenon’, ‘affective and magical’. History, on the other hand, is intellectual, secular, and critical.

At the heart of history is a critical discourse that is antithetical to spontaneous memory. History is perpetually suspicious of memory, and its true mission is to suppress and destroy it. At the horizon of historical societies, at the limits of the completely historicized world, there would occur a permanent secularisation. History’s goal and ambition is not to exalt but to annihilate what has taken place.²

It advances the argument little further to note contrary views, where this annihilation is seen not as the domination of secular, critical rationality but as an event within history, a sacred, ever alive and affective, eschatological moment³, or where contemporary culture is in fact distinguished by its lack of historical consciousness.⁴ More to the point is the possibility that ‘historical societies’—and which are not?—may have interestingly different horizons and ambitions: that is, interestingly different modes of ‘historical action, consciousness and determination’,⁵ or, in my vocabulary, different ways of disposing of the past. History may turn out to be just as intriguingly diverse as memory. There are numerous general speculations about the significance and nature of historical consciousness—in addition to those already mentioned, Eliade’s suggestions about the mythical importance of origins, and Nietzsche’s critique of history are often cited.⁶ But there appears to be more scope for

¹ I discuss an influential Australian ‘invention of tradition’ argument (which in fact predates the book of that name) in chapter 4 below.
² Pierre Nora, ‘Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire, Representations, no. 26, Spring 1989, p. 9. This article is a translation of Nora’s theoretical introduction to Les Lieux de Mémoire, Paris 1984-.
⁶ See Mircea Eliade, Myth and Reality, New York 1963, and Friedrich Nietzsche, Thoughts Out of Season: The Use and Abuse of History, New York 1976. For discussions and applications of these works, see (for Eliade) Barry Schwartz, The Social Context of
productive inquiry at a lower level of generality; at a level, for example, where (as Graeme Davison has observed) the Nietzschean modes of monumental, critical and antiquarian may leak into each other, or where history may involve both exaltation and annihilation, or where history may make quite specific links between a magical point of origin and a secular eschatology. It is at that lower level of analysis that this study operates.

If students of collective memory are anxious to differentiate it from history, those academic historians who are concerned with 'public history' take an altogether different tack: they wish to apply academic skills to non-academic forms, in order to improve them. Commemorative celebrations certainly raise issues of the sort that are often discussed in this burgeoning field: they represent the past in non-academic, deliberately popular ways, which are nevertheless of sufficient cultural significance to demand historians' serious attention; they are created, ostensibly for the public benefit, at the intersection of government, bureaucracy, public bodies, associations and business; and they are also often politicised, because of their proximity to government and because their representations of the past may be resisted. Yet within public history there has been little discussion of such celebrations, apparently because of public history's own history and characteristic emphases. The subject has a strong leaning towards public historical policy, especially in areas of growing employment for history graduates, such as museum and heritage policy. It is motivated by a practical desire to contribute positively to public policies and management practices. The subject emerged in Australia in the late 1970s and grew in the 1980s, in the midst of an expanding tourism market, increased investment in museums, rising urban property values, and more complex, frequent and intractable arguments about the preservation and representation of the past. Public history is not intended to be a separate sub-discipline: it encompasses a variety of techniques, using information from social history, architecture, public policy, museology and other fields in order to address specific problems.

Because public history has applied itself to specific problems, it has been much more concerned with some areas of public culture than others. Recent special issues of the journal *Australian Historical Studies*, devoted

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1 For a recent survey of public history in Australia, see John Rickard and Peter Spearritt (eds), Packaging the Past? Public Histories, Melbourne 1991.
to public history and the 1988 bicentenary, are good examples of this selectiveness: uses of history in schools, film and media receive scant attention. The last two are areas important for the study of celebrations, yet historians have engaged with them only occasionally.1 Australian inquiry into the relations between history and film has been done almost entirely outside history departments,2 and where extended discussion has occurred elsewhere, it has been the result of historians' direct involvement in making historical films. A recent American Historical Review forum on history and film, for example, concentrated on problems to do with the transformation of historians' written discourse into the cinema's visual discourse.3 The forum was not about historical films as such, but about how historians might come to influence them: the logistics of strategic intervention. Such discussions risk saying too little about the very cultural domains at issue. The AHR forum, for example, barely touches on questions of film style, although style is identified as a major problem for the historians' project of reform. As one of its contributors points out, the best sources for ideas about film style and history are to be found outside historical studies.4 I have made considerable use of John Tulloch's books Legends on the Screen and Australian Cinema: Industry, Narrative and Meaning,5 and Stuart Cunningham's Featuring Australia: the Cinema of Charles Chauvel.6

These issues notwithstanding, historians have written much about 'history's history' in Australia. This includes the work of K.S. Inglis and A.W. Martin from the 1960s7, and the larger quantity of more recent studies, many of them generated by the Bicentennial History Project. K.S. Inglis's writing has been especially useful for the third chapter. His discussion of the nineteenth-century search for heroes in The Australian Colonists and his essay on Australia Day helped shape my inquiries into visionary history. Among other work published for (and against) the 1988

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2 See for example Tom O'Regan and Brian Shoesmith (eds), History on/and/in Film, Perth 1987.


bicentenary, Graeme Davison's Australian commentary on Nietzsche's critique of history and Chris Healy's account of popular written histories informed my discussion of more recent histories in chapter five.1

_Australians: a Historical Library_ sliced into the commemorative years 1838, 1888 and 1938; valuable accounts of all the anniversary celebrations were included. The 1938 volume has been particularly helpful. It includes three chapters on the anniversary: one on the events themselves, by Gavin Souter; one on Aboriginal responses and the broader situation of Aboriginal politics, by Jack Horner and Marcia Langton; and one on the production and reception of the novel _Capricornia_, which won an anniversary literary prize, by Ann McGrath.2 The Project also produced the journal _Australia 1938_, which published useful work by Terry Smith, John Storey and Drew Cottle.3 Other accounts of 1938 appeared during the 1988 bicentenary, among them Martin Thomas's article in the _Age Monthly Review_4 and segments in television series presented by Russell Braddon and John Pilger.

My approach departs from some of this historiography. The argument of much of that work has been to do with disclosing the politics of historical representation, in electoral, class, race, and gender terms. This is an emphasis shared with a great deal of writing on similar topics elsewhere.5 There is no question of the political nature of state anniversaries; but how should this be determined? I have approached the problem mainly through the specific questions of history's disposability and warrantability. Humphrey McQueen's analysis asserts the ideological aims of 1938: restoring 'the bonds of empire', binding 'the wounds of class conflict', and showing 'a united, active people to possible invaders'.6 Martin Thomas has argued that the celebrations sought to engender 'nationalism or a sense of nation-ness'. These arguments are similar to that of Jean Chesneaux, who has claimed that the sanitised histories presented in state

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2 Souter, 'Skeleton at the Feast'; Horner and Langton, 'The Day of Mourning'; and McGrath, 'Mirror of the North'; all in Bill Gammage and Peter Spearritt (eds), _Australians 1938_, Broadway 1987, pp. 13-43.
5 For British and American examples, see Raphael Samuel, _op. cit._, and Robert W. Rydell, _All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916_, Chicago 1984, especially on the 1876 Centennial, pp. 9-37.
6 Humphrey McQueen, _Social Sketches of Australia_, Ringwood 1978, p. 158. For a similar analysis see _Communist Review_, February 1938, pp. 3-4.
anniversaries have essentially political functions: easing social tension by obscuring struggles in the present, magnifying the power of the state, and cultivating amnesia.¹ They are also close to the position of Eric Hobsbawm in *The Invention of Tradition*, where it is argued that representations of tradition in primary schools, public ceremonies and public monuments served the purpose of maintaining ‘the social fabric and the social order’ in the face of mass democracy.²

A problem for all these analyses is in showing how it is that the social ‘needs’ which spectacles are said to meet are expressed and articulated in the first place. In this study, I wish to emphasize the difficulties of attributing definite political ‘functions’ to the representations of history. In my chapter on visionary history, for example, I consider Siegfried Kracauer’s influential essay on ‘The Mass Ornament’, which reads the politics of spectacles off from an unduly limited interpretation of their performance and reception. Rather, visionary history and pioneering history provide good examples of the interconnections Davison points to between the ‘monumental’, the ‘critical’, and the ‘antiquarian’. They call into question the unqualified certainty with which we can say, for example, that national history ‘legitimates’ the state, or that the ‘hegemony of modern nation-states’ is ‘critically constituted by representations of a national past’.³

Others writers on 1938, like the cultural critic Russell Braddon have simply emphasized the falsity, vacuity, or absurdity of the celebrations. Since the history which constituted them became indefensible, the celebrations of the thirties have been repugnant. Mona Ozouf has written about events in another time and place ‘For the spectacle of the festival to work its spell, one must be willing to give oneself to it; one’s heart must be in it. But for those who resist the spell of illusion, the whole machinery creaks; the effects become tawdry, incongruous, ridiculous’.⁴ Although there are substantive differences between the critics I have mentioned, their work has much in common. Martin Thomas and McQueen depend on a theory of ideology as false consciousness; Russell Braddon on a sense of the shallowness of popular cultural forms, but both insist on ‘the tyranny of discourse’,⁵ and both wish to apply academic canons of

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³ In the terms that Ana Maria Alonso uses to describe ‘The Effects of Truth: Representations of the Past and the Imagining of Community’, *Journal of Historical Sociology*, vol. 1, no. 1, March 1988, pp. 50, 41.
⁵ As Martin Thomas puts it in his article, *loc. cit.*
historical authenticity to popular representations. Neither sees the reception of public spectacle as problematic, and neither investigates the actual conventions of representation which operated in the historical spectacle of the 1930s.
Organising History

Organisation

In 1935 when the conservative Government of New South Wales decided to make the 1938 anniversary a major public celebration, it had recourse to certain precedents. It made its arrangements in the knowledge of a local history of celebration and spectacle: it knew how the centenary of white settlement in Australia had been celebrated in 1888, what happened when the Commonwealth of Australia was inaugurated in 1901, and about the organisation of the Victorian and South Australian state centenaries in 1934 and 1936. It knew that there were ways of doing these things.

It knew, because it was briefed by the Premier's Department, that the programmes for these elaborate occasions had much in common. The same sorts of things happened and the same kinds of people contributed. Openings, dedications and unveilings figured in the programmes as dramatic moments concentrating attention on important symbols. On Wednesday 25 January 1888 a statue of Queen Victoria was unveiled in Sydney; on 27 January Centennial Park was opened; on 31 January the foundation stone of the new Parliament House was laid. In Centennial Park the Commonwealth was inaugurated on 1 January 1901. School children appeared frequently, creating impressive mass spectacles. While Queen Victoria's statue was being unveiled, twelve hundred school children sang the national anthem. They staged a 'display' at the Sydney Cricket Ground on 3 January 1901, a 'physical culture display' during the Victorian

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1 See 'Notes on the Australian Centenary Celebrations, Sydney, 26 January, 1888', 29 August 1935, AANSW 9/12441.2; 'Commonwealth: Inaugural Celebrations. Programme of Entertainment', 26 August 1935, AANSW 9/12441.2; 'Notes of a visit to Melbourne, 1st June, 1936', AANSW 9/2440.2; and 'Centenary Celebrations, South Australia, 1936', 3 June 1936, AANSW 9/2440.2.
Organising History

celebrations, and an ‘Empire Pageant’, an athletics competition and a ‘1,000 voice concert’ during the South Australian ones.

Military power also had a standard place. Visiting warships and military parades were popular. When the Melbourne parade was called off because of rain the authorities were ‘severely criticised’.\(^1\) Exhibitions were also a common element in anniversary calendars. They were usually devoted to distinct subjects: art, stamps, historical artefacts and records; a few ambitious and expensive ones took in all agriculture and industry. Finally, there were entertainments, usually banquets for the notables and processions, sport and fireworks for the rest. The traditional 26 January regatta was held in 1888, and in the 1930s air races attractively combined speed, danger, heroism and technology. All these events were brightly publicised. Posters were designed to attract tourists, films were made, newspapers published special supplements.

Thus the elaborate celebrations of state anniversaries were, or claimed to be, several things. They were commemorative; they generated and circulated histories. They were educational, entertaining and they attracted tourists. In one of these ways or another, they were supposed to involve the whole populace. ‘In embarking upon these important Celebrations the State Government is fully justified on many grounds’, said J.M. Dunningham, the New South Wales ‘Minister in Charge of Celebrations’ in a 1936 radio broadcast.

Honour and vigour are inspired in the citizens of a country where there is a strong historical sentiment, and I know of no country whose history is happier than is ours. We have therefore the greater pleasure in celebrating the date of the birthday of our nation.

A Government must be materialist. Compulsorily it must consider the economic effect of each step that it takes, and past experience shows the invigorating effect of Celebrations upon trade. They may not be the springs and sinews of industry, but they provide a magnificent economic stimulus.\(^2\)

The celebrations would attract people from other states and other countries. ‘So far, Australia has neglected to exploit its wonderful assets of climate, scenery, pleasure resorts, and possibilities for profitable investment.’ Visitors would spend money to everybody’s benefit. Hotels

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\(^1\) Notes of a visit to Melbourne’, *ibid.*, p. 4.

would provide jobs for 'cooks, laundresses, housemaids, and male helps'. There would be more business for tradesmen. The railways would be busier. 'And so we have the happy cycle of increased spending making more work, which, in turn, provides more wages for spending.'\(^1\) Thus an economic argument buttressed the Government's insistence on the popular character of the anniversary.

While the New South Wales parliamentary Opposition did not object to celebrating the anniversary, they did dispute the Government's self-styled 'materialism'. The arguments of J.T. Lang, leader of the Australian Labor Party in New South Wales, depended on the labour movement's own oppositional populism. Lang was concerned about profiteers exploiting the anniversary and about invitations extended by the Government to people outside Australia.

> We are told that by spending money lavishly on the 150th Centenary Celebrations, and by inviting visitors from overseas, much money will be spent, but in fact the expenditure of that money will be on mere frill and show. Statements that the expenditure of money on the celebrations will provide employment are made to pacify unfortunate people who are out of work.... But money will be found to be expended for the enjoyment of many persons who do not belong to Australia.\(^2\)

Lang argued against the 'happy cycle' of increased spending and employment. 'The only way to cause an increased expenditure here is to pay more money to the toiling masses.' The effect of tourism was only that people spent their money in one place rather than another: 'It is like pressing a rubber ball—if you press it in one place it bulges in another place.'\(^3\)

There is no evidence that the New South Wales Government did seriously inquire into the possible economic benefits of any celebrations, nor is there any indication of internal debate over whether celebrations should be held. Cabinet was aware of the then ending Victorian celebrations and the approaching Sydney anniversary, and assumed that the Government had to be responsible for whatever would be arranged.\(^4\) So claims about material benefits should be regarded as after-

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\(^1\) Ibid., p. 2.
\(^2\) *New South Wales Parliamentary Debates*, Legislative Assembly, [1 December 1936], p. 860.
\(^3\) Ibid.
\(^4\) See the Cabinet Submission from the Under-Secretary, Premier's Department, 17 July 1935, AANSW 9/2445, p. 1.
the-fact justifications, although some people certainly were employed as a result of the anniversary—the people who built the exhibition buildings at the Sydney Showground, for example. Dunningham’s ‘happy cycle’ of general prosperity must be read as part of the anniversary’s publicity. Even if it had been sincere about doing so, it is doubtful whether the Government was capable of an accurate assessment of the anniversary’s value. It lacked the necessary economic and administrative equipment. Like other Australian governments, it possessed a Treasury which disbursed funds and an Auditor-General’s office which ensured that they were spent in the proper way, but no agency dedicated to ensuring the effectiveness and efficiency of public expenditure.¹

In political terms the celebrations presented an opportunity and a problem for the Government. Like other State anniversaries, the celebrations would emphasise progress and prosperity—clearly an emphasis necessary for attracting investment and of assistance to any Government. In the absence of tangible progress and prosperity, assurances were more important than ever. The conservative Government of Bertram Stevens had come to power in controversial circumstances: in 1932 the Labor Premier Lang was dismissed by the Governor of New South Wales, after struggles also involving the Commonwealth Government over Lang’s policy of defaulting on the State’s interest payments to London banks. Stevens’ United Australia Party in coalition with the Country Party won office on a platform of sound economic management. But economic recovery from the early thirties was slow. By the second half of the decade, the Government had only two clear advantages over the Labor Opposition: Labor was badly divided between pro- and anti-Lang factions, and the Government could insist that the State’s economic situation was better than it had been under Lang. The economic standard for comparison was thus severe depression: by this measure the Government could claim to have performed creditably.² All the images which the anniversary would generate of industry and agriculture in a productive land were the Government’s stock in trade.

But in hard times expensive celebrations might also be politically damaging, especially if they were held immediately before an election, as the 1938 ones were. Elaborate and exclusive occasions trumpeting wealth might simply draw people’s attention to the unequal fashion in

which wealth was distributed. In the parliamentary debate over the Victorian centenary one member made this point:

... [When I reflect] that the great city of Melbourne has been built by the working class, I am disgusted to hear that the Centenary committee is making arrangements for prominent persons in other parts of the world to visit Melbourne during the celebrations. Although they could afford to pay their way, those people are invited to come here and feast and enjoy themselves at the expense of the underfed. ... The worker's share of the celebrations will be provided by themselves. Probably there will be a procession and the schoolchildren will give a demonstration. Their parents will be invited to witness it, and the children will probably get a bun each.¹

From the Government's point of view the celebrations had to have some popular plausibility—they had to be seen to involve people outside the exclusive 'social' circles around Government House or the elite businessmen's clubs. The celebrations had to demonstrate not only prosperity and progress, but also the people's faith in those things. This was the imperative that drove the public spectacle of the thirties: it was not simply spectacle in a public place, but spectacle which sought a public audience and transformed that audience into spectacle itself. It was also spectacle which was supposed to be funded substantially by public donation, so governments could not be accused of excessive spending on 'mere frill and show'.

The construction of public spectacle was not easy, as my discussion of the 26 January pageantry in chapter three suggests. In that chapter and the next I discuss the positioning of historical agents and audiences in particular events. Here I describe briefly the way in which such spectacles were organised and administered. In this context the experience of the Victorian and South Australian centenaries was also important. But before turning to those examples, an ostensible difference between them and the 1938 anniversary should be canvassed. The New South Wales State government promoted the anniversary as 'Australia's One Hundred and Fiftieth Anniversary Celebrations', although it was in reality an entirely State-based event. I do not think this indicates a serious disjunction between national and State functions. Rather, the title was disingenuous: no attempt was made to promote a national celebration, and the New South Wales organisers were much more interested in the imperial significance of the event.

¹ Victorian Parliamentary Debates, Legislative Assembly, [7 September 1933], p. 1279.
An early public report entitled 'Australia's 150th Anniversary' announced the New South Wales government's intention to celebrate to best advantage the 150th Anniversary of the founding and settlement of New South Wales, and incidentally of Australia, which as a Commonwealth has become an important part of the British Empire.¹

The Committee Structure

The Governments of both those States had taken responsibility for the celebrations. They had created statutory authorities dedicated to them and these organisations ostensibly operated at some distance from government and bureaucracy. State and local government politicians and public servants held most of the important positions in these organisations, while other positions went to representatives of the parliamentary Opposition and numerous and—with some exceptions—conservative non-government organisations, among them returned soldiers' clubs, women's organisations, the press and entertainment industries, chambers of commerce and manufactures, agricultural and historical societies. This representative structure helped to defuse, but did not answer, suggestions that State anniversaries served only narrow interests. As Dunningham explained this to parliament:

We have endeavoured to avoid any discrimination of any description [in the selection of committee members], because we are anxious to receive the co-operation of all sections of the community. We are not celebrating any political event; we are celebrating the foundation of a country of which hon. members on all sides of the House should be very proud. Therefore, we hope to receive the wholesale support of all sections of the community.²

The disadvantage of such a broadly based council was that it was too large for on-going administration. Elaborate committee and sub-committee structures took care of that, and, as it turned out in Sydney, they took care of the most important decision-making as well. The committee structure of the Celebrations Council is set out in an addendum at the end of this chapter. The rôle of the Council itself was ratification. The Minister reported to it at regular intervals, but it made no important decisions. The most important committees were the

¹ AANSW 9/2440.2 p. [1].
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Executive, Finance and Programme committees. All proposed expenditure had to be approved by the Finance Committee, all proposed events by the Programme Committee, and everything, especially policy, was examined by the Executive Committee. All the important paperwork went through C.H. Hay, the Executive Officer, who was Under-Secretary of the Premier's Department. With this structure the Government was able to control the Council. Hay was a particularly experienced and efficient organiser. When the ceremonial opening of the Sydney Harbour Bridge was disrupted by a member of the right-wing New Guard, it was Hay who replaced the slashed ribbon.1

A large number of other committees were responsible for organising specific events on the programme. Among these were the 'Water Pageant Committee' which arranged the re-enactment of Phillip's landing on 26 January and the 'Literary Committee' which ran poetry and fiction competitions. Some committees or individuals were asked for advice on contentious matters: for example, Karl Cramp, a Fellow of the Royal Australian Historical Society and Chairman of the Historical Exhibition Committee, was called on to adjudicate historical issues and became the Council's *de facto* authority on history. His rôle in the planning of Phillip's re-enactment is set out in Chapter Three. Others who sought to intervene in questions beyond what were regarded as their immediate responsibilities were rebuffed.

Who was on these committees? Which organisations? Although Dunningham spoke of the desire to include 'all sections of the community' all sections were not represented. People were appointed because of their ability to do certain tasks. One group which was closely involved was the Citizens of Sydney Organising Committee, who were volunteer organisers, mainly businessmen, from the Sydney City Council. The Organising Committee had been formed to plan the celebrations of the opening of the Sydney Harbour Bridge in 1932; they gained experience running Eisteddfods, 'Festival Weeks', tree plantings, the Duke of Gloucester's visit to Sydney in 1934 and the local celebration of the 1937 coronation.2 The Chairman of the Committee's Council of Management was Sir Samuel Walder, an Alderman in the City Council, United Australia Party member of the Legislative Council and company chairman and director. Other members of the Citizens of Sydney Organising Committee helped plan the 1938 anniversary. It seems likely that it was this committee which in 1935 prompted the Government to make formal arrangements for 1938.

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2 On the history of the Organising Committee, see AANSW 9/2440.1.
Representatives of the press were included in the committee structure, since newspaper publicity had to be promoted and co-ordinated. Executives from the entertainment industries, especially cinema and theatre, were more important: they organised the large-scale public spectacles, such as the 'March to Nationhood' pageant. Film was also used as historical spectacle itself. In the aftermath of the 26 January pageantry, the trade newspaper *Film Weekly* boasted 'To the Industry Goes the Credit of Providing a Great Historic Pageant. Organised and Directed Largely by the Trade, with Stanley S. Crick the Central, Inspiring Figure'. Crick was Managing Director of Twentieth Century-Fox in Australia and a member of the Citizen's Organising Committee.

To the industry, then, go the honors of the occasion, with especial congratulations to those in its ranks who supplied the creative ideas, together with the supervisory skill, energy and labour that brought forth the pageant—colourful, impressive, and spectacular beyond realisation except by the million people estimated to have witnessed it.1

'...The enduring, patriotic value of the pageant', according to *Film Weekly*, was that not one of those million spectators could have seen it 'without the feeling that he had thereby become a bigger Australian'.2

Business interests were strongly present: banks, graziers, farmers, real estate agents, retail traders and other employers were represented through their associations on committees or the general or associate Council.3 These well-off people, and the office holders of patriotic clubs, business chambers and the Royal Agricultural Society who were also appointed in numbers to the Council, were the Government's constituency. They were looked on as potential donors of money, goods and services to the celebrations: in Victoria one businessman had given one hundred thousand pounds to the centenary fund.4 The response from business in New South Wales was, however, disappointing. The appeal fund languished. The Programme Committee noted in September 1937 that many firms had not donated at all. They regarded

the presentation of a float [to the Pageant of Industry and Commerce] as their contribution, in whole or part, to the Celebrations Fund, although the cost of a float

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1 *Film Weekly*, 27 January 1938.
2 Ibid.
3 Associate members of Council were invited to attend when particular matters were under discussion.
4 See *The MacRobertson Centenary Gestures*, Melbourne 1934.
itself is more than balanced by the advertising derived from it.\(^1\)

No trade unions were on the council; labour's representative was J.T. Lang. 'A “silvertail” committee!' claimed a Labor member of parliament. Dunningham replied: 'I think it is hardly fair to use that term.'\(^2\)

Some organisations were involved in the anniversary because of their position in the field of history-telling. The Royal Australian Historical Society, the Women's Pioneer Society, the Australasian Pioneers' Club and the Returned Soldiers and Sailors Imperial League of Australia presided over various sectors of the national past. Cramp's position as 1938's praetor of the past has already been mentioned. The pioneers' and returned soldiers' groups claimed authority over nineteenth century land settlement and twentieth century war.

Women, or women pioneers, were important historical figures in the thirties, as Chapter Four argues. A number of women's organisations were represented in a separate but not autonomous part of the Celebrations Council, the Women's Advisory Council, which included a Women's Executive Committee responsible for day-to-day planning and administration. Although this Council represented diverse women's groups—as the addendum below shows—it was controlled by two organisations in particular, the National Council of Women and the Country Women's Association. The United Associations of Women, led by the socialist and feminist Jessie Street, did not take part. The Chairman [sic] of the Women's Executive and Advisory Council was Mildred Muscio, president of the National Council of Women. Muscio's politics—and those of the National Council generally—were not a direct challenge to the Australian 'gender order'.\(^3\) She was concerned with the government of 'the social', as Donzelot has called it: issues of family, education, psychology, health and 'racial hygiene' which cut across public and private spheres. She had been a member of the 1927 Royal Commission on child endowment, the Board of Social Study and Training (which accredited social workers), a 1933 inquiry into secondary education and a 1934 inquiry into child welfare.\(^4\)

\(^1\) Programme Committee agenda papers, 27th meeting, 6 September 1937, AANSW 9/2441.2.
\(^2\) New South Wales Parliamentary Debates, Legislative Assembly, [1 December 1936], p. 853.
\(^4\) Australian Dictionary of Biography, vol. 10, Melbourne 1986, p. 651. References to other National Council of Women campaigns may be found in Kerreen M. Reiger, The
The Women’s Advisory Council was marginalised. Nevertheless, it succeeded in articulating a celebratory history which was very different to that presented in the central events of the anniversary. This history reappears in Chapter Four.

The Anniversary Programme

It is probably misleading to think that it was the Council which created the anniversary, conceiving and planning all the events on the celebrations calendar. The Council was really the result of the anniversary. One of the main ways in which it was possible to suggest a broad base of support for the celebrations was to fill the celebrations programme up with a wide variety of events. Most of these could not be organised especially for the celebrations, so all sorts of events which would have happened without the anniversary were included in the programme—for example conferences, sporting events, and annually recurrent events like the Royal Easter Show and Anzac Day. The result was that all the people and organisations which usually ran these events became involved in the Celebrations Council.

The programme was divided into three months of events held in Sydney; country events held in the twelve country towns which had received Government support for their anniversary plans; and Newcastle events. This thesis deals only with the Sydney events: there were several kinds of these. First, there were historical spectacles generated by the anniversary. These are the subjects of analysis in the chapters that follow. They were elaborate, usually expensive spectacles specifically to do with the colonisation of Australia. There were not many of them. On 26 January a re-enactment of Phillip’s harbour landing opened the celebrations. It was immediately followed by the ‘March to Nationhood’ procession through the city. The re-enactment and the ‘March to Nationhood’ were combined in a ‘Gala Night’ performance at the Sydney Showground on the evening of the anniversary day. Other events of this kind were a ‘Public School Children’s Festival’ at the Sydney Cricket Ground on 6 April and—on a much smaller scale—a re-enactment of a pioneers’ tea party on 6 March.

We could also include in this category of spectacle a film that was made about national history for the anniversary, Frank Hurley’s *A Nation is Built*.

Second, there were events generated by or specifically arranged for the anniversary but not historical in nature: among these were the Women’s International Conference, an exhibition of school work, the

pageant of commerce and industry, a deep sea fishing competition, the British Empire Games and a military review in Centennial Park. Some of these—receptions, dinners, luncheons, and garden parties—were not open to the public. Finally, there were all those events which were simply integrated into the celebrations calendar. Apart from the Agricultural Show and Anzac Day, these included sailing, cricket, horse-racing and life-saving, and various professional conferences.

Conflict Within the Council

We can only conclude that the Council was a conservative organisation representing no-one so much as the Government's own constituency. Nevertheless, there was conflict within the Council. Many of the disputes that arose were, not surprisingly, tiresome and irrelevant quarrels over personal responsibilities. There were also arguments of considerable interest about the way in which history was being presented. Some of these form part of the chapters that follow. The Women's Advisory Council and the Literary Committee did argue against the scenarios proposed by committees organising pageants. Stanley Crick's 'Australia's March to Nationhood' procession was particularly contentious; one of the main issues was the pageant's evasion of convict history.

In April 1937, Flora Eldershaw, a member of the Literary Committee and the Women's Advisory Council, wrote to the Celebrations Executive, urging that

...historical truth not be sacrificed to the desire for an attractive spectacle. Historical truth is a matter not merely of accuracy of detail in the scenes presented, but is essentially involved in the selection of the scenes themselves. ...we felt that the omission of the convict element, which was the raison d'être of our foundation, was to falsify the whole basis of our history, and secondly that the omission of the Eureka Stockade from the representation of the gold discoveries was similarly to falsify our fight for freedom, which is as truly a result of gold as was the increase of wealth and population.

We felt that pride in the nation's achievement, which is the basis of the whole celebrations, is not compatible with shame at the means by which it has been achieved, and that we should not burk any aspect of our history merely because it might appear unflattering.¹

¹ Copy of letter dated 5 April 1937, AANSW 9/2444A.1.
Eldershaw listed several other problems with 'Australia's March to Nationhood': the omissions of 'the growth of parliamentary and responsible government', the federal movement, the trade union movement and arbitration. The matter was discussed at a meeting of the Executive Committee. Karl Cramp's advice was contained in a letter to Hay:

... with reference to the first point she raises—the inclusion of the convict element—I feel that no useful purpose could be served by its representation. If included, it will certainly arouse comment, and probably much public adverse criticism. Convicts were kept in the background in Phillip's time, and it would be a form of historical accuracy to keep them there now. The significance of the convict element has been over-emphasized in our histories, as criminality actually plays no more part in Australia's growth than in America's or even Great Britain's. Our growth is independent of that element and is due to the great influx of free settlers from 1793 onwards. Our wonderful expansion owes everything to the spirit of enterprise and initiative that came from the latter source, and even the success of the original foundation was due to the foresight and organisation of Phillip and those loyal to him and not to the convicts.

Moreover I feel that we should not ask any one to play the part of a convict. Who would be willing to represent a convict in a pageant which is not quite the same as a theatrical performance?

Cramp did think that federation and the Eureka Stockade ('the Redcoats attacking') should be included, and arbitration and unionism as well, 'if they can be picturesquely produced'.

1 Ibid.
The argument tells us a good deal about the criteria governing the spectacle's representation of the past. It was important to be able to defend the pageant from the point of view of 'historical accuracy', but historical accuracy was no more, and probably less, important than the perceived requirements of attractive spectacle. In the pageant's treatment of gold mining, for example, there were two floats, one showing Edward Hargraves and others panning a stream, the other, called the 'symbolic gold float', quite different:

This float is fantastic [reads the pageant programme]. We see a beautiful girl dressed in gold. In one corner is another beautiful girl with Pandora’s Box. There are six little nigger boys on the float, and, kneeling at the feet of the symbolic figure of Beauty and Gold, is an old miner in blue dungarees, offering her a nugget of gold.1

Here the first, plainly figurative, float provides a historical reference for the 'symbolic' one. However, the difficulties with the 'symbolic' float are

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not to do with 'falsifying' history: they concern metaphors rather than facts, and conventions of spectacle, allegory and popular entertainment far removed from the conditions of warrantability which Eldershaw was unable to apply.

On the question of convict history, Cramp may have been partly right: there could well have been 'adverse criticism'. It was not only in the 1938 anniversary that convict history was evaded—most Australian historians appear to have shared Cramp's view of the 'over-emphasis'.¹ In his 1937 history of Immigration into Eastern Australia 1788-1851, R.B. Madgwick made no apology for omitting any account of transportation;² and one 1928 history of the Australian population anticipated elements of Cramp's argument:

In dealing with the settlement of Australia, writers frequently refer to those unfortunate compulsory early settlers of the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century, and ignore the real industrial foundation which was laid in the decade following the discovery of gold. The type of settler of this latter period differed essentially from the earlier rejects and had much of the robust sturdiness of character which marked the American New England pioneers of the early seventeenth century, though they may have lacked their religious fervour.³

In Edwin J. Brady's Australia Unlimited (1918), we find a further argument about the unimportance of the convicts. According to Brady, a 'large number' were political prisoners and even more were victims of obsolete laws or were petty offenders. 'Taking these facts into consideration', Brady concluded

it will be seen that the early convict system was no more than an inverted line in the chapter of Australian beginnings, having little or no effect upon the future Australian race, which had its real foundation in the

¹ For an account of Australian attitudes to convict history, see Tom Griffiths, Past Silences: Aborigines and Convicts in our History-making', Australian Cultural History, vol. 6 (1987), pp. 18-32.
unimpeachable pioneer strain of vigorous and enterprising early colonists.¹

There were other currents in history-writing: Eris O’Brien’s analysis of transportation The Foundation of Australia appeared in 1937, condemning the society which made people convicts. This kind of argument was used by critics of 1938’s historical orthodoxy, whose work is discussed elsewhere in the thesis. But criticism which depended on a sharp distinction between the demands of historical accuracy and those of spectacle seems too simple.

Opposition

While there was argument about the anniversary’s history from marginalised groups within the Council, forthright opposition to the celebrations and their account of the past came from some of those excluded from debate and discussion. The Communist Review argued that convict history was evaded because the State Government was fearful of an economic downturn, anxious to attract investment and determined to strengthen the ‘bonds of Empire’.

Why wake up the fact that George III, in one of his few sane moments, could conceive of nothing better for Australia than a penitentiary for England’s convicts, or that the whole early history of Australia was marked by struggle against the British ruling class to end convictism and for independence and self-government. Those are matters to be forgotten.

... Historical truth is rather too fearsome a spectacle for our unheroic, cowardly, money-coinning capitalist exploiters.²

The left-wing press celebrated labour victories and condemned past oppressions: ‘OUR HISTORY BEGINS IN SUFFERING’ ran a headline in Railroad, the newspaper of the Australian Railways Union. ‘Our history unfolds to the Panic-stricken Yells of the Aboriginal; the Groans of the lashed Convict; the Stifled Murmurs of the Pioneering Men and Women.’³ A commentary of oppositional national history followed, printed across the bottom of each of the Railroad’s pages:

¹ Edwin J. Brady, Australia Unlimited, Melbourne 1918, p. 31.
² February 1938, pp. 3-4.
³ Railroad, 1 February 1938, p. 1.
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Capitalism—Young, Ruthless, Irresponsible and Arrogant MEETS OPPOSITION FROM Convicts, Peasants Workers and Irish Nationalists ... the People Demand Their Rights from Squatters and Officials ... Every Part of N.S.W. Has Contributed a Deed of Working Class Heroism¹

The 1938 May Day parade also presented a workers' history of Australia, celebrating 'Labor's own sesqui'. Terry Smith and John Storey have described the May Day pageant.² One float, captioned 'He Tried to Form a Union', showed a convict being flogged against a tree. Others depicted the Eureka Stockade and the anti-conscription struggles.

The most profound opposition to the anniversary was organised by the Aborigines Progressive Association, which declared 26 January a 'Day of Mourning and Protest'. On that day they held a public protest and a conference for Aborigines only. The Association had been founded in Dubbo in May 1937 to fight for 'education, opportunity and full citizen rights'.³ Two weeks before the Day of Mourning, the Publicist newspaper had published for the Association a manifesto by two of its leaders, Aborigines Claim Citizen's Rights!⁴ There J.T. Patten and William Ferguson wrote:

    The 26th of January, 1938, is not a day of rejoicing for Australia's Aborigines; it is a day of mourning. This spectacle of 150 years' so-called 'progress' in Australia commemorates also 150 years of misery and degradation imposed upon the original native inhabitants by the white invaders of this country. ...

    You came here only recently, and you took our land away from us by force. You have almost exterminated our people, but there are enough of us remaining to expose the humbug of your claim, as white Australians, to be a civilised, progressive, kindly and humane nation.

¹ Ibid., pp.1,4,7.
² Loc. cit.
⁴ Some of the ideas in Aborigines Claim Citizen's Rights!, for example the assurance that 'Aborigines can be absorbed into the white race within three generations without any fear of 'throw-back' may have in fact been the work of the Publicist's right-wing nationalist publishers, P.R. Stephensen and J.B. Miles. See Jack Horner and Marcia Langton, loc. cit.,p. 34.
By your cruelty and callousness towards the Aborigines you stand condemned in the eyes of the civilised world.¹

The Association's policy was that the Commonwealth should take responsibility for Aboriginal affairs. 'Citizen Rights' implied the right to education and equality before the law. It followed that Aborigines should be able to participate in the industrial arbitration system, to own land and property, and to have access to workers' compensation, old-age and invalid pensions. Their right to work for cash should be unrestricted.² The greatest obstacle to achieving these rights was the policy of 'Aboriginal protection' operating throughout Australia. The principle behind the Protection Acts is the same in all States', observed Aborigines Claim Citizen's Rights! 'Under these Acts the Aborigines are regarded as outcasts and as inferior beings who need to be supervisee in their private lives by Government officials.'³

The New South Wales Aborigines Protection Board was the specific target of the Day of Mourning. The Aborigines wanted it abolished. At the conference they described the abuses which occurred on the Board's reserves: labour without payment, the arbitrary removal of people, inadequate schooling, undernourishment, inadequate health care, and neglect of the elderly.⁴ Although the conference did not agree on the best way to move from protection to citizenship, it unanimously resolved that

We, representing the Aborigines of Australia, assembled in conference at the Australian Hall, Sydney, on the 26th day of January, 1938, this being the 150th Anniversary of the Whiteman's seizure of our country, hereby make protest against the callous treatment of our people by the whitemen during the past 150 years, and we appeal to the Australian nation of today to make new laws for the education and care of Aborigines, and we ask for a new policy which will raise our people to full citizen status and equality within the community.⁵

¹ Aborigines Claim Citizen's Rights! is reproduced in full as Appendix Two of Vote Ferguson for Aboriginal Freedom, op. cit., pp. 192-8.
² See Australian Abo Call, April 1938, p. 1.
⁴ Australian Abo Call, April 1938, p. 2. On the system of protection generally, see Andrew Markus, 'Under the Act', Australians 1938, pp. 47-53, and Bill Gammage and Peter Spearritt (eds), All that Dirt, Canberra 1986.
⁵ Australian Abo Call, ibid.
The Association had, without success, attempted to contact the Aborigines brought to Sydney for the re-enactment of Phillip's landing. The Board was keeping them in police barracks, and obstructed any communication. In their account of the Day of Mourning in *Australians 1938*, Jack Horner and Marcia Langton place the conference in the context of Aboriginal political struggle in the late 1930s. The Association's campaign against protection led to a parliamentary select committee of inquiry and meetings with Commonwealth Government politicians. But these achievements did not lead to greater ones. Press response to the manifesto ranged from polite incomprehension to an angry refusal to apologise for attempted genocide. By May 1938 the Aborigines Progressive Association was deeply divided. Horner and Langton write: 'The Day of Mourning was a powerful symbol, but it, too, brought about little change. The year ended, as it had begun, with Aborigines having much to mourn.'

Why didn't the protest have more impact? Beyond the immediate political obstacles which the Association faced, there was an almost general white indifference to the Aborigines' demands. It is possible to put this down to a pervasive anti-Aboriginal racism, but doing so tells us little about the actual histories which the Aborigines were contesting. The chapters that follow attempt to specify the historical concepts which were used by white Australians to describe and explain colonisation.

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1 See Horner and Langton, *loc. cit.*
2 See *Vote Ferguson for Aboriginal Freedom*, *op. cit.*, p. 60.
3 'The Day of Mourning' *loc. cit.*, p. 35.
Addendum: The organisation of Australia's 150th anniversary celebrations

These lists are divided into four parts: the Executive of the 150th Anniversary Celebrations Council, the Council's various committees and their chairs, the Women's Executive and the Women's Advisory Council.

The source for parts one and two is 150 Years in Australia, the official souvenir programme for the celebrations.

1. The Executive

Chairman
B.S.B. Stevens MLA
Premier and Treasurer

Minister in Charge of Celebrations
J.M. Dunningham MLA
Minister for Labour and Industry

Deputy Chairman
M.F. Bruxner MLA
Deputy Premier and Minister for Transport

Executive Member
C.H. Hay
Under-Secretary, Premier's Department

Liaison Officer
C.W.O. Tye
Premier's Department

Vice-Chairman
Archibald Howie MLC
Lord Mayor of Sydney

Deputy Executive Member
G.F. Murphy
General Organising Secretary

D.G. MacDougall
Citizens of Sydney Organising Committee

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1 This position was subsequently held by Alderman Nock, who was Lord Mayor of Sydney, 1938-1939.
2. The Committees

Art Competitions Committee
B.J. Waterhouse
President, Society of Arts and Crafts

Art Exhibition Committee
Will Ashton
Director, National [NSW] Art Gallery

Aviation Committee
H.W. Whiddon MLC

Band Council of Control
Sir Samuel Walder MLC
Chairman, Council of Management, Citizens of Sydney Organising Committee

Country Celebrations Committee
M.P. Dunlop MLC
President, Primary Producers' Union

Decorations (Public buildings) Committee
H.E. Street Under-Secretary, Department of Works and Local Government

Eisteddfod Council
W.G. Layton

Exhibition Committee
F.P. Kneeshaw MLC
President, Chamber of Manufactures

Finance Committee
Sir Samuel Walder MLC
Chairman, Finance Committee, City Council

Historical Exhibition Committee
K.R. Cramp President, Royal Australian Historical Society

Illuminations and Decorations Coordination Committee
Roy Hendy Town Clerk, Sydney

Literary Committee
S. Elliott Napier
President, PEN Club

Mitchell Library Committee,
W.H. Ifould

Principal Librarian, Public Library of NSW

Music Committee
Edgar Bainton
Director, Conservatorium of Music

Newcastle District Council of Control
H. Fenton Lord Mayor, Newcastle

Pageant Committee
S.S. Crick Chairman, Festival Committee, Citizens of Sydney Organising Committee

Pageant of Nations Committee
Harald Bowden
General Manager, J.C. Williamson Ltd

Press Reception, Entertainment and Allocation Committee
Percy Hunter Vice-President, Motion Picture Distributors Association of Australia

Programme Committee
J.M. Dunningham MLA
Minister for Labour and Industry

Publicity Committee
E.C. Sommerlad MLC
Managing Director, Country Press Ltd

Services Committee
Rear Admiral R.H.O. Lane Poole

Transport and Accommodation of Spectators Committee
T.J. Hartigan Commissioner for Railways

Tree Planting Committee
V.T. Jeune Motion Picture Distributors Association of Australia

Water Pageants Committee
E.W. Austin
President, Maritime Services Board

Women's Executive Committee and Advisory Council
Mrs Bernard Muscio [President, National Council of Women, N.S.W.]
Miss I.M. Fidler (Deputy) [C.W.A.]
3. The Women’s Executive

'... from this branch of the Celebrations tree, graceful and valuable additions will be made to the schedule of events'

J.M. Dunningham

'... it had been thought better to keep the Women’s Committee to themselves as they seemed to work better that way.'

J.M. Dunningham

The source for this list is *The Peaceful Army.* Unfortunately no information is given there about which women’s organisations were represented. I have used the Premier’s Department papers (especially AANSW 9/2451), the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* and *Who's Who 1938* to fill in most of the gaps.

Chairman
Mrs. Bernard Muscio MA
President, National Council of Women of New south Wales

Acting Chairman
Miss Isobel Fidler BA
President, Country Women’s Association

Hon. Secretaries
Miss A.M. Rienits Mrs J.G. Farquharson
National Council of Women

Miss M.A. Bailey BA
Headmistress
Miss Ruby M. Board
Country Women’s Association;
National Council of Women
Dame Constance D’Arcy DBE MB ChM
Obstetrician and gynaecologist;
Professional Women Workers’ Association
Mrs Hubert Fairfax OBE
State Secretary, Country Women’s Association
Lady Julius
Mrs W.H. Read
President, Rachel Forster Hospital for Women

Ida Leeson, Mitchell Librarian, resigned from the Executive.

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1 Transcript of broadcast talk, Radio 2FC, 20 July 1936, AANSW 2/444A.1
2 Celebrations Council Finance Committee minutes, 2nd meeting, 1 October 1936, p. 1.
4. The Women's Advisory Council

Miss Marjorie Barnard BA  
Novelist and historian  
Dr Mary Booth BA MB CM OBE  
President, Anzac Fellowship of Women  
Mrs M.F. Bruxner  
Wife of Deputy Premier  
Miss Imelda Cashman  
Trades Hall  
Mrs A.P. Clinton  
President, Women's Industrial Arts Society  
Mrs Francis Darsow LLA  
Miss Flora Eldershaw BA  
Novelist and teacher  
Miss E.P. Evans JP  
Secretary, Trained Nurses Association  
Miss L.M. Fowler MBE  
President, Young Women's Christian Association  
Mrs Edmond Gates JP  
National Council of Women  
Miss Portia Geach JP  
Artist; President, Housewives Progressive Association  
Dame Mary Gilmore DBE  
Poet  
Lady Gordon  
St John Ambulance Association  
Miss O. Kelso King  
Assistant State Commissioner for Girl Guides  

Mrs W.A. Lingham  
Mrs David Maughan  
President, Women's Guild of Empire  
Mrs John Moore OBE  
Australian Broadcasting Commission  
Mrs William Moore  
Miss Carmel Nyhan  
Trades Hall  
Mrs Sibella Macarthur-Onslow CBE  
Deputy President, The Victoria League in New South Wales  
Mrs Margaret Preston  
Painter  
Miss Thea Proctor  
Writer  
Miss Jeannie L. Ranken  
Women's Pioneer Society  
Mrs Maud Sherwood  
Mrs B.S.B. Stevens  
Wife of Premier  
Mrs Florence M. Taylor ARAIA  
LRIBA AMI Struct. E. President, Arts Club  
Mrs A.G. Thomas  
Miss Evelyn M. Tildesley MA  
Headmistress  
Lady Walder  
President, N.S.W. Women's Amateur Sports Council  
Mrs F.B. Walker  
President, Women's Loyalty League
Visionary History

Sydney Morning Herald, 24 January 1938
'As we look back a hundred and fifty years the first five years of Australia—Phillip's Governorship—hang like a bright medallion against the anonymous centuries that lie behind them. It is not so long ago, and yet it is all time as far as white Australia is concerned. In the broad daylight of the eighteenth century, against a natural background so ancient and so fully evolved as to make civilisation look like a child's toy, a thousand people began to colonize a continent. It was a beginning without glamour, and the settlement was without inner cohesion. It was kept together by discipline and necessity. It was fused together into a community, a new entity, by one man—Phillip. He not only fashioned it, he created it.'

M. Barnard Eldershaw, 1938

'The one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the foundation by Captain Phillip of the penal settlement of New South Wales falls in 1938. Such occasions are commemorated in Australia, and many interpretations of the story of the "infant colony" advanced. Some are interesting, but they are not all consistent.'

H.V. Evatt, April 1938

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The celebrations of 1938 presented Arthur Phillip as the central, visionary hero in Australian history: Phillip was given the credit for transcending the wretchedness of convict settlement and imagining in the future beyond it a thriving part of the British Empire. Phillip’s importance was such that he was a model for other heroes, whose own visionary powers were regarded as prefiguring or supplementing Phillip’s.

Although he was shown to be uniquely important in Australian history, there was nothing singular in the emphasis on a heroic vision. Modern notions of historical agency insist on the importance of willed social change; the assertion of foresight is integral to politics, past and present. The argument that human agency, the capacity to change the world, is closely associated with foresight can be found in Kant’s Anthropology, and remains enormously influential in the twentieth century. ‘[Foresight] is the condition of all possible practice and the goal to which man directs the use of his powers.’ Against the prophets of the Fall, Kant wrote that history could be made a priori, ‘when the soothsayer himself makes and organizes the occurrences which he announces in advance’.1 The notion of foresight is embedded in post-enlightenment notions of history. Prophecies, dreams, prognoses and visions all possess a profundity with or without irony in much historical writing: take for example the relationship between agency and foresight in Manning Clark’s first volume of national history, which appears to make ‘dreams’ its basic subject matter:

For just as the history of a man turns some to a tragic vision of life, the history of men’s dreams prompts others to work for the day when that wealth of love which used to be lavished on Him is turned upon the whole of nature, on the world, on men, and on every blade of grass.2

Visionary history turns its back on yesterday; prophets are interested in changing things. The classic works on liberation and revolution are animated by anticipation: consider The Wretched of the Earth. On the other side of the fence there is the visionary history which interests me here, the history which operates in a settler society unconscious of indigenous history. In 1938 historians thought Australia was a ‘new’ country. Its brief history proved the British capacity for colonisation.

1 For these quotations I am indebted to Koselleck’s account of Kant’s historical philosophy and its influence: see Futures Past, op. cit., pp. 203-5.
2 A History of Australia, Volume 1, From the Earliest Times to the Age of Macquarie, Melbourne 1962, p. 380.
Beyond this, its history was an expression of a future, which was located for the present in the past, attached to particular people. I discuss below numerous examples of how this thinking worked in Sydney in 1938, but here I can illustrate what I am referring to with a quotation celebrating Wakefield from the *Special Centenary Issue* of the Adelaide Advertiser, 1 September 1936:

...visualising new Englands beyond the sea—planned and scientifically built lands of opportunity where people of British birth might make a new home and found a virile young nation... lands free of the taint of convictism... All these things did the visionary foresee.1

All this confirms Wakefield’s historical singularity, and does so strictly according to the conventions of visionary history. Readers of the Advertiser were being asked to think about Wakefield in exactly the same way as audiences of Frank Hurley’s centenary film *Oasis* were asked to think about the South Australian hero, Colonel Light: ‘The excellence of [Adelaide’s] site and charm of its surroundings are a perpetual reminder of the wise forethought of its founder Colonel Light’. Although it was by no means always the most common or dominant mode of historical understanding, visionary history permeated Australian historical commemoration and celebration in the 1930s. In Victoria, an ironic vision of the site of Melbourne—‘This will be the place for a village’, attributed to John Batman—was one of the slogans of the 1934-5 Centenary, and was used to caption pictures of the modern city’s tall buildings, charming river, spacious parks, and wide, tree-lined roads. Such a picture emphasized how much Batman had not foreseen; how much more impressive the city was than its founder could have guessed! But in neither Victoria or South Australia was the representation of visionary history at the centre of celebrations. I discuss below possible reasons for its special significance in 1938.

Visionary history is a historical from which is clearly well-suited to spectacle: as well presenting an image of the past, it locates images of the present in history. Paul Carter has observed how the artifice of certain kinds of ‘imperial’ history-writing works to legitimate colonisation by presenting a chronology of events on an imaginary historical stage. In these narratives a mythological, all-seeing eye takes in the apparently inevitable signs of settlement and foundation. The imperial theatre depicts colonial places, like ‘Botany Bay’, as if they had always been there, ignoring what Carter insists was ‘the intentional world of

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1 p. 3.
historical individuals, the world of active, spatial choices'. The visionary history described in this chapter is a degree more explicitly theatrical: its all-seeing surveyor is himself cast as a historical individual, and instead of merely ‘legitimating’ colonial transformation, it celebrates this, with fulsome credit to the act of vision itself.

The historiography of Australia is populated by prophetic heroes and filled out with their prophecies. Why are they there, and what, now, is to be done with these figures? The histories they sustain will plainly no longer do, though such histories continue to be written. As contemporary heroes these prophets from the colonial past have little enough to say, although they are still present in our historical culture, where they are residual figures, left over and still unaccounted for. As the Age observed in January 1988:

Two hundred years ago Governor Phillip, as he watched anxiously from South Head for the supply ship which could save his little company from starvation, could not possibly have seen all that we now take for granted.

Concerned as he was with his immediate problems, he did his duty according to his lights and his vision of the future was cloudy and obscure. Without some vision, however, his burden would have been intolerable.

A person two hundred years ago could not see what we now see. Why is that not taken for granted? Why do we need to know about Phillip’s burden? Why do we need to assess the vision of a historical individual? These things, which would otherwise only occupy antiquarians, are important to a certain idea of how history works. This idea is that some singular historical individuals are the voices of time. Like the soothsayer, they imagine and articulate the future. Unlike the soothsayer they do not have to actually bring about what they announce: their words themselves have a sufficient significance. History is, according to this idea, to do with documenting and repeating what these voices have to say.

This history of visionary individuals is no longer widely accepted in Australia, although it may still possess some attraction, as the Age’s

3 The Age, 2 January 1988.
deliberations suggest. But this particular kind of history has not to my knowledge been much discussed. It is possible that rereading the visions attributed to heroes may tell us a great deal about the articulation of history in specific contexts. Their visions were dramatic expressions of social and political relations; an analysis of these, and the way in which they were performed, provides the clearest sense of the content and implications of this kind of history.

Arthur Phillip was and is one of these many visionary heroes. In an Australian context he provides an outstanding example of how history could be determined by foresight. Phillip’s occupation of the central ground in the 1938 celebrations is worth extended consideration.

This chapter analyses the mythical rendering of Phillip. The focal point is the rôle he was given in spectacles which re-enacted the 1788 landing and his reputed prophecy on the occasion. But re-enactment was not confined to the 26 January pageantry; the fateful landing was represented repeatedly in other spectacles, and in film, sound and print. These media representations were sometimes spectacles in themselves, as the discussion here of the official commemorative film will demonstrate. It is also necessary to place Phillip within the broader historical field: black letter historiography, iconography, and recurrent ritual. While a survey of these other contexts illuminates his particular rôle as a figure in popular historical spectacles, it also suggests the vigorous continuities between cultural fields sometimes regarded as utterly different, for example, serious academic biography and government publicity posters.

The principal issue is the nature of the visionary history constructed around Phillip. While its content and broader implications are amenable to examination, this history as it is presented is resistant to further inquiry. It does not explain itself: it takes its premisses as self-evident. It was a historical mode employed rather than discussed, and what discussions did take place are difficult to follow. In a rare moment of reflection George Mackaness’s biography of Phillip quoted Shakespeare’s Warwick: ‘There is a history in all men’s lives, figuring the nature of the time deceased’. Mackaness explained that this meant ‘merely that man reflects one side of all historical events’. His reading of the line is dubious at least, the more so because he goes on to say something which simply contradicts Warwick: ‘History has always been dominated by character, often by one man’s character’.1

Despite its apparent blandness, this statement is closer to a theory of visionary history than any thing else I can find written in the shadow of the events of 1938. It sums up the genre plainly: this history involves some form of domination. Such a statement unavoidably raises real difficulties. There is an opposition proposed between 'one man's character' and 'history'. So a plausible heroic history of this kind must establish the character of its heroes, and it must also say something about the worlds they change and bring into being. There must be ways of knowing the hero's character, of elucidating it from historical sources. What is the nature of this domination of character over history? How is it conceptualised and represented? Is the relation between the hero and ordinary people who are not heroes also one of opposition and domination? What are the consequences of heroism? Are they good or bad? These difficulties arise continually in the visionary history of Phillip, in the central spectacles of 1938 and in work across the wider historical field. They may be merely questions to be answered; they may involve contradictions to be resolved or ignored.

To emphasise this aspect of visionary history is to begin to suggest how it might once have made sense, or failed to, for the audiences of public spectacle. It is an approach which, in Quentin Skinner's terminology, 'maximises the rationality' of heroic history. The real issue, foreshadowed in chapter one, is not the truth or otherwise of what heroic history says: what is far more interesting is its warrantability at a certain time. Warrantability need not depend on the kinds of argument and narrative used in scholarly biographical writing; it may also be conferred by styles of performance and visual representation. In spectacle it need not be linked with realism or naturalism. In some of the events discussed below, for example, there was an explicitly supernatural dimension. Indeed most visionary history refers to some kind of metaphysical, supernatural, magical or religious force, and there is no reason to assume that these references made it any less convincing.

Nor, however, can plausibility be assumed. A popular legend centred on Phillip was not something easily established. Before 1938, for example, Phillip's career as a national hero had been only occasionally successful: official organisers of the 1888 centenary had almost ignored him, although Sir Henry Parkes had incorporated a 'Phillip Hall' into his ambitious—and short-lived—scheme for a huge 'State House' in Centennial Park. In 1888 James Cook was the single most important historical figure. Many people believed that the anniversary on 26

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1 See 'On Describing and Explaining Beliefs', op. cit.
2 See Graeme Davison et al., Australians 1888, Broadway 1987, p. 5.
January commemorated Cook’s landing.\textsuperscript{1} In the New South Wales court at Melbourne’s 1888 exhibition, an elaborate tableau depicted ‘the landing of the great navigator’ at Botany Bay. Other space was given over to a model of a cave, made of cork, plaster and paint, and a large wine trophy. Phillip’s bust, and that of the then governor, Lord Carrington, decorated archways.\textsuperscript{2} In 1938 Bertram Stevens put the relationship between the two men this way: ‘Captain Cook made possible the foundation of Australia as a British nation, but Phillip, more than any man, turned that noble achievement into real account.’\textsuperscript{3}

The story of Phillip’s uneven progress towards heroic stature is also closely connected with the story of the recurrent ritual of 26 January, known at different times and among other things as ‘First Landing Day’, ‘Foundation Day’, ‘ANA Day’, ‘Anniversary Day’ and ‘Australia Day’. This day has never been taken as seriously as its organisers have hoped. In 1878 ‘the Vagabond’ noticed how many Australians ‘recked little of the occasion so long as they got their holiday’.\textsuperscript{4} When the 1938 celebrations were being planned, organisers thought it necessary to ensure that their efforts were appreciated:

\begin{quote}
Education authorities will be asked to take steps to prepare school children to look forward to the day with keen expectancy and with a familiarity as to details of its surrounding history so that in due course everything that is enacted will bear full meaning and significance.\textsuperscript{5}
\end{quote}

Various reasons have been suggested for Australia Day’s apparent lack of impact, including its strong association with Sydney and the fact that it comes near the end of school children’s long summer holidays. In December 1935 the day was the subject of a ‘Retrospect’ which G.D. Milford appended to his sketchy but passionate book, \textit{Governor Phillip and the Early Settlement of New South Wales}. Here he discussed the significance of Anniversary Day and the place of Phillip in Australian history generally. Milford asserted that 26 January was recognised as outstandingly important in New South Wales, but commented regretfully in a footnote that ‘other Australian States do not recognise the exact day [26 January] ... as ‘Anniversary Day,’ but prefer to celebrate

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{1} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 24.
\textsuperscript{2} \textit{The Centennial Magazine}, vol. 1, no. 1, August 1888, pp. 61-2.
\textsuperscript{3} \textit{Daily Telegraph}, 19 January 1938, p. 7.
\textsuperscript{5} ‘Statement for Consideration of Council of Management in Conjunction with the Under Secretary of the Premier’s Department’, 31 July 1935, p. 6. AANSW, 9/2444A.1
\end{flushleft}
the event of ‘Phillip’s landing, &c.,’ on the Monday following...’.\(^1\)

Milford noted with disapproval Holman’s 1911 proposal to change Anniversary Day to 22 August, the day in 1770 when ‘Captain Cook took formal possession of Australia (sic)’.\(^2\)

Bruce Kapferer characterises Australia Day as a celebration of the Australian state; Ken Inglis observes that ‘national days are a preoccupation of new states and new regimes’.\(^3\) They are a preoccupation because they present difficulties of an unusual kind: firstly they demand popular enthusiasm for the nation and the state, and secondly they raise in a very stark way the issue of the relations between the nation and the new state or regime. Nationalists assert a necessary identity between the nation and the polity. But in a post-colonial settler society the ground is often difficult to negotiate; nation and state are also defined in relation to other sodalities, residual and emergent. Nationalists find the territory contested.

In 1938, 26 January was an Anniversary Day with various possibilities: a British Empire Day, an Australia Day, a Sydney or New South Wales Day. These days had their concomitant imperial and national histories, alternative grapplings with the problems of a visionary history based upon Phillip. This chapter discusses several of these alternative histories. While most of it is given over to the imperial presentation of the celebrations themselves, I do discuss nationalist alternatives in the final section. Because the chapter emphasises the differences between these histories, it may be worth recalling how much these histories have in common, and how resistant others were to any visionary history centred on 26 January. Kapferer’s eliptical argument is that Australia Day celebrates the state in contrast with Anzac Day’s more popular celebration of the nation; the Australia Day emphasis on the establishment of state power then helps to explain its unenthusiastic reception.\(^4\) Certainly the evasiveness of some Australia Day editorials is extraordinary. In 1938, the Melbourne *Argus* commented:

> History being full of anniversaries, it is difficult to light upon “first” events of importance. Governor Phillip was assuredly our first Governor and the founder of the first settlement; but the minds of Australians turn

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1 Sydney 1935, p. 87.
3 ‘Australia Day’ *loc. cit.*, p. 22.
4 See *Legends of People, Myths of State*, Washington 1988, pp. 121, 169.
to that very interesting "first" landing of Englishmen on Australian soil in 1770...\(^1\)

Implicitly the problem with Phillip was that for some reason he was not 'very interesting'. Yet visionary history depends entirely on making the hero interesting. Organisers in 1938 tried to make Phillip a substantial, attractive figure. They extracted him from the eighteenth century and made him a man of the future. The *Argus* gives us a further indication of how difficult this game was, an image that will stand in contrast with those discussed below. Next to their editorial they published the illustration from *Punch* reproduced here: Phillip's ghost as a bewildered shadow, pondering the passage of time and the unpredictability of events.

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\(^1\) p. 8.
Historiography

Phillip's historical reputation was complex. He was not regarded as singularly important in much of the Australian history-writing of the 1930s. Whereas visionary history naturally asserted the hero's transformation of Australia, academic historians of the 1930s tended to be more interested in analyses of Australian economic development; they had little time for governors of penal settlements. In 1935, for example, Stephen Roberts published *The Squatting Age in Australia*, which begins with an argument for ignoring Phillip and the rest of the first fifty years of white settlement altogether. Roberts breezily noted
that it was 'not unusual in the history of organisms for the protoplasm to remain in a state of retarded development—almost quiescence—for some considerable time'.¹ In this fashion the 'real story of Australia's progress' began in 1835, with the 'capitalists and yeomen ... asserting their supremacy' over convictism.² Edward Shann's *An Economic History of Australia*, first published in 1930 and reprinted in 1938, presented the early decades of white Australia as a sterile period of 'prison communism', a mean prelude to 'the mighty drama of free settlement inland' beginning in the 1820s.³

According to Shann, it was the dynamic power of capitalism which succeeded in transforming Australia. But Phillip's resort to rationing had introduced 'a communistic system'. Under communism individuals were motivated 'not by calculation, but by the primitive impulses of loyalty and fear, to do what in the sum of their efforts will suffice for the needs of all.'⁴ In this context Phillip was a competent, perceptive, unheroic ship's captain, whose capacity to transform the struggling settlement was limited by his own inexperience, others' bad planning, and the corruption and degradation of his human company. Shann discusses the matter of Phillip's foresight quite directly. He argues that a ship's captain could not have known in advance what the requirements of an antipodean farming community would be, and contrasts the famous 'most valuable acquisition' prophecy with a more sober comment on the colony's prospects.⁵ If Shann presented anyone from the age of 'prison communism' as forward-looking, it was John Macarthur, eager 'to develop, as was then the vogue in Britain, a capitalistic agriculture'. But Macarthur's early proposal to take up land was rejected by Phillip, who in Shann's view failed to see the contribution private settlers might make to the colony.⁶

Brian Fitzpatrick contested Shann's version of Phillip in *British Imperialism and Australia*,⁷ published in 1939. H.V. Evatt, a High Court judge and another of Wood's ex-students, introduced this book, the first volume of Fitzpatrick's own economic history of Australia. The introduction is dated April 1938. Evatt remarked on the custom of commemorating state anniversaries in Australia, and how such occasions gave rise to various interpretations of the first settlement.

² Ibid.
³ Cambridge 1938, p. 79.
⁴ Ibid., p. 16.
⁵ Ibid., pp. 7-8.
'Some are interesting, but they are not all consistent.' He criticised particularly the tendency to see a 'great Imperial design' at work in 1788. 'The truth is otherwise. It is very fitting that at a time of commemoration it should be revealed so lucidly by Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick.'

Fitzpatrick substitutes his category of 'prison farm' for Shann's 'prison communism', and argues that Phillip did recognise the need for agricultural development, including land grants for officers like Macarthur. Fitzpatrick's Phillip was not a visionary, but an administrator struggling in difficult circumstances:

Phillip, in the circumstances of poor equipment, unaccustomed climatic and other local conditions, unskilled management and labour, officers' intransigence, almost complete severance from outside sources of supply, drought, and food shortage, established during his five years 172 settlers on land grants...

In this debate the issue is not Phillip's inevitable connection with the convict system, but the kind of economic regime he established in New South Wales. Neither Shann nor Roberts regarded him as a participant in the development of colonial capitalism. For them he was linked with the repressive, unproductive power of the state.

That, however, was the viewpoint of one strand of economic history: it does little to suggest the diverse meanings which were already attached to Phillip. Milford, for example, regarded him as a 'sportsman', adding that to him this seemed to 'afford [Phillip] the greatest possible honour'. The qualities of a sportsman were 'a high code of ethics', 'a disregard of self-interest', 'a spirit of generosity', being 'active even to the point of being aggressive', a willingness to take risks and to aid his opponent (although Milford does not identify Phillip's opponent clearly), and 'courage, perseverance and stability'. 'Such a character... every Australian should, and indeed must regard with the utmost admiration....'

Such a muscular Phillip was eccentric. In the larger field of historical debate, both the political and economic implications of Phillip's heroism were more ambiguous than Shann's 'capitalism versus

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1 Ibid., p. 7.
2 Ibid., p. 90.
3 Ibid., pp. 88-9.
communism' economic history would suggest. Phillip's greatness was usually regarded as residing in two things: his establishment of the state, and his visionary fore-knowledge of Australia's destiny. Mackaness's biography claimed that Phillip, 'by his foresight, enthusiasm and high administrative powers, successfully established a British colony at the very Antipodes'. 'Arthur Phillip well and truly laid the foundation stone of the Commonwealth of Australia', he wrote.¹ Phillip's admirers did not always connect both claims; it will become clear that they could be and in 1938 were contradictory. What both interpretations necessarily shared was teleology. 'What is the measure of this man's achievement?' asked Viscount Wakefield of Hythe at a 1935 thanksgiving service held in Phillip's memory. The answer is, surely, the Commonwealth of Australia. Not only did Phillip found its first settlement, but he established its government on lines of wise and benevolent autocracy, exactly suited to the needs of the time, from which grew the federations of free peoples which to-day constitutes the Commonwealth of Australia.² Celebrating Phillip's state-craft from a different point of view, M. Barnard Eldershaw made the same basic claim nevertheless in their 1938 biography Phillip of Australia.³ We shall return to this book.

Those who presented Phillip as a visionary hero claimed inspiration from a speech he made on 7 February 1788 proclaiming New South Wales, although—or perhaps because—nobody knew what was actually said at the time. As we know, this was the speech which was re-enacted on Australia Day 1938; and it had proved the central source before. Roderick Flanagan, in The History of New South Wales (1862), had given Phillip a long speech expounding his radiant vision of an 'Australia, rich beyond measure in her own possessions':

its fertile plains tempting only the slightest labours of the husbandman to produce in abundance the fairest and richest fruits; its interminable pastures, the future home of flocks and herds innumerable; its mineral wealth, already known to be so great as to promise that it may yet rival those treasures which fiction loves to describe...⁴

Flanagan's reference to fiction is disingenuous. Quite apart from the fact that its subject, 'Australia', was a word Phillip never used, the whole

² Admiral Arthur Phillip, R.N., Founder and First Governor of Australia, [London] 1935, p. 9. The memorial service was held in London.
³ London 1938.
speech was invented.¹ Such a device was an ageing historiographical convention when Flanagan used it; nevertheless, Becke and Jeffery worked the passage into their 1899 biography, *Admiral Phillip*.² These writers’ uses of visionary history are less interesting than the projected content of the vision. While Wakefield, Mackaness and Barnard Eldershaw insisted on the political and constitutional content of Phillip’s vision—his establishment of the state—Flanagan, Becke and Jeffery recorded an economic prophecy.

The visionary history of 1938 had an imperial and economic emphasis. Great importance was attached to one of Phillip’s prophetic remarks in particular. In his school textbook *A Story of the Australian People*, published in 1935, Karl Cramp made Phillip ‘the founder of Australia’, but Cramp’s Australia was always an imperial one. Readers learnt that this founder was a confident man who ‘successfully launched’ the new colony, sure that it would become ‘the most valuable acquisition Great Britain had ever made’, despite the burden of work, frequent misfortune and pervading pessimism. Cramp’s Phillip was a familiar version. The same year a similar model appeared in Charles Chauvel’s epic feature *Heritage*, a winner at the revitalised Commonwealth Film Awards. Phillip was only the first of many Australian heroes in *Heritage*, but his triumph over pessimism and deprivation set the pattern for them all.

Unlike Flanagan, Cramp did not entirely fabricate his Phillip the Visionary. The sources for the crucial ‘valuable acquisition’ line appear to be several letters Phillip wrote in July 1788, in which he described the penal settlement as ‘a valuable acquisition’ and ‘a most valuable acquisition’. These were published in the *Historical Records of New South Wales* in 1893. They show that the contexts of the significant phrases were not wholly favourable, as in this example:

... it will be four years at least before this colony will be able to support its self, and perhaps no country in the world offers less assistance to first settlers; still, my Lord, I think that perseverance will answer every purpose proposed by the Government, and that this country will, hereafter, be a most valuable acquisition.³

I will return to the ‘valuable acquisition’ vision soon: Cramp’s unusually imperial treatment of Phillip is essential to an understanding

of the 1938 re-enactment of Phillip’s landing. Before discussing that event, however, we need to take stock of the issues raised already, and address a historical problem that arises from Phillip’s rôle in 1938.

Phillip and Empire: Precedents and Political Contexts

Phillip was without doubt a much more important figure in 1938 than in earlier anniversaries. But he had clearly not enjoyed a steady or straightforward ascent to heroic status. His claims to historical significance were challenged or ignored by historians and others in the 1930s as they had been during the 1888 centenary. So why was Phillip so central in 1938, rather than Cook, for example? Clearly Phillip had one advantage over Cook: he was an articulate hero, only too ready to speak from the past to the present. Misgivings about Cook’s silence on the subject of the country he ‘discovered’ are scattered through the historiography. In a 1924 Royal Australian Historical Society paper, F.S. Adrian noted that Cook was ‘for some reason, deaf to the call of Australia’. Describing the Cook tableau at the 1888 Exhibition, The Centennial Magazine’s reporter observed that the figures it portrayed ‘so faintly comprehended’ its ‘historical significance’. Yet Phillip’s pre-eminence in 1938 still seems surprising, especially in the light of his uneven historiography and the general lack of enthusiasm associated with Anniversary Day.

Cook’s importance had certainly not declined since the nineteenth century: in 1934 the reconstruction in Melbourne of a Yorkshire cottage associated with him had been one of the events of the Victorian centenary. Karl Cramp, who was more responsible than anyone for the representation of Phillip in 1938, did not understate Cook’s significance in A Story of the Australian People. A portrait of the Captain bordered by scenes from his life adorned the book’s frontispiece, and Cramp acknowledged that ‘The Columbus of Australia’ was ‘aptly, though wrongly, referred to as the discoverer of Australia’. He traced the Australian nation directly to Cook:

Cook and Banks’s reports were so favourable that it was decided to send [convicts] to Botany Bay. Further settlements were made from time to time, and thus it was that the British race became the proprietors of the

2 Loc. cit., p. 62.
whole of Australia with the ideal ‘One Continent, One People, One Destiny’.¹

Unfortunately there is no record of any ‘why Phillip?’ discussion among the organisers of 1938. Nor does the account of the organisation I have offered in chapter two help much: while that does explain the form the anniversary took, and while it does clear the ground for an analysis of how the historical spectacles worked, it cannot explain the choice of one historical figure for celebration rather than another. But on the basis of the archival material we have there is no way of knowing whether such a choice was ever deliberately made, or, if it was, what reasons people had for making it. This makes it difficult to identify direct ‘causes’ for Phillip’s prominence, and that fact in turn sets limits on the kind of analysis that is possible.

For example, if we do not know why Phillip was made central, it becomes difficult to judge arguments about the intentions of the celebrations, such as the idea that they were designed to strengthen imperial sentiment after the crises of the Depression. On the other hand, we can see how (as this chapter goes on to show) the 1938 spectacles interpreted Phillip’s achievement in a very imperial way, by pointing out, as the foregoing discussion of the historiography has done, that alternative interpretations were possible, and by noting similarities between the references to empire in the celebrations and imperial sentiments elsewhere. In other words, by contextualising Phillip’s rôle, we may be able to infer its rationale, and understand more precisely its significance in the circumstances of the time.

What emerges then as the most salient aspect of Phillip in 1938 is his position as a governor of New South Wales, who has an importance for the present by virtue of his prophetic anticipation of it. While other historical interpretations of Phillip emphasized the nature of his administration or his belief in future prosperity, the particularity of the official re-enactment representation of him was that it underlined both his visionary anticipation of the future and his empire-building. It underlined the connection with Britain. In his speech at the re-enactment, Phillip’s presence was that of an articulate imperial representative. He stressed an imperial prosperity flowing from the colonial attachment.

Phillip’s status as a governor, and possibly an ideal governor, is crucial for an understanding of the problem I have raised: the relationship between the 1938 events and earlier anniversaries. It points immediately to a very clear difference between Phillip and Cook. While

¹ Ibid.
Visionary History

Cook stood for the progress of science and the success of hard work, Phillip, as an instrument of the Crown, set out the facts of empire. He placed Australia and New South Wales within a larger structure of government and explicitly discussed their dependent economic development. My argument, then, is that we must take the 1938 Phillip seriously as an imperial presence. In the next section of this chapter I will show how that was so, by looking closely at the re-enactment of his landing; for the time being, I concentrate on the issue at hand.

This implies that the differences between 1938 and the 1888 or 1934 anniversaries are not quite what they appear to be. If Phillip was the central figure by virtue of his imperial rôle, then that was not unusual: representatives of empire were usually central figures in Australian celebrations.

Take 1934, for example: I have already mentioned the importance of Cook in that centenary, but Cook was not the most important person in those celebrations. The visiting Duke of Gloucester, Prince Henry, was far more prominent. An Age editorial on 'the significance of the centenary' began

To-day the people of Victoria bid the Duke of Gloucester formal but cordial welcome. He is welcomed for his own worth, welcomed also for the sake of that gracious and well-beloved King whom he represents. The sons and daughters of Victoria's early settlers are no lip-serving courtiers.... The story of these one hundred years has countless facets, but one in which the people of this State take special pride is the unwavering, deepening loyalty that has ever been maintained to the British throne. The very name of the State is a link with an occupant whose name is revered.¹

On the same day 250,000 people lined Melbourne's streets to welcome the Duke, and see him announce the beginning of the celebrations period. 300,000 watched him dedicate the Shrine of Remembrance a few weeks later. The Duke's visit was an undoubted success. The point can also be made by looking at popular front opposition to the 1934 celebration, which fixed upon the imperial implications of Henry's visit in the light of the recent economic crisis and the beginnings of European re-armament. In this context two visitors other than Henry were important: Maurice Hankey, the British Cabinet secretary and also secretary of the Committee of Imperial Defence, and Egon Kisch, the

¹ 18 October 1934, p. 8.
Czechoslovakian leftist whose adventures trying to get into Australia ensured that the Movement Against War and Fascism’s Anti-War Congress was well publicised.¹

The 1888 centenary was no less an imperial celebration, and the representatives of the Crown had a no less important part in them. The governors of the Australian colonies, New Zealand and Fiji were all present. Newspaper coverage concentrated on vice-regal activities and declarations, and, again, opposition to the events appears to have been focussed on the imperial relationship. The Bulletin proposed that the Eureka Stockade insurrection provided a better anniversary for celebration than that of ‘the day we were lagged’. For the Bulletin, there was no contesting the fact that the progress of white Australia was worth celebrating; it was the imperialism of the anniversary that was offensive. Progress within the empire could only mean exchanging chains of iron for chains of gold. ‘Australia shows many signs of advancement, and the records of them are writ large on the documents filed in the office of the English money-lender.’²

The Bulletin’s response to 1888 may well have been ‘cynical to the point of perversity’,³ but over the short programme of official events empire appeared again and again. It was Lady Carrington, wife of the governor of New South Wales, who unveiled Queen Victoria’s statue to begin the celebrations. The Herald reported:

The ceremony of unveiling was but momentary, though full of meaning and interest. It was performed with electric quickness in the presence of thousands, through whose minds must have passed with equal rapidity the thought that they were not only honouring the Queen whom the statue represents but the constitutional system of government which they enjoy under her reign.⁴

Lord Carrington himself opened Centennial Park on 26 January. That night he presided over a state banquet. The next day he watched a regatta on Sydney Harbour, and gave an official dinner in the evening. The next major event on the programme was a Trades and Labour Demonstration. Carrington received the officials, made another speech,

³ Sylvia Lawson, ibid., p. 134.
⁴ Sydney Morning Herald, 25 January 1888, [no page number].
and laid the foundation stone for the new Trades Hall. Later in the week he and Henry Parkes laid the foundation stone for a new Parliament House.¹

What is notable about the 1888 and 1934 centenaries, apart from the crucial and exhausting rôles played by those representing royalty, is the absence of any historical spectacle comparable to that arranged in 1938. Neither event attempted a major re-enactment. This does not indicate a smaller scale of spectacle on those occasions. On the contrary, it indicates only that those spectacles took a different form, built around the use of a royal or vice-regal figure who made significant statements about the importance and meaning of the anniversary. In the case of 1934, a series of mass-events based upon the doings of the Duke ensured the success of the Victorian event. The audiences in Sydney in 1888 were much smaller, although 50 000 people did attend the ceremonial unveiling of the Queen's statue.²

It is important that this form of spectacle, which had been so popular in Victoria, and indeed during Henry's visit to Sydney in November 1934, when he dedicated the Anzac Memorial in Hyde Park, was not available to the organisers of 1938. No royal visit was possible for Sydney in 1938. The leader of the 1938 British delegation, Earl de la Warr, was a mere Master of the Privy Seal, an insignificant figure in relation to the Duke of Gloucester.

State rivalry was naturally present in the succession of celebrations in the thirties. But in 1888, Sydney’s celebrations had been greatly outshone by Melbourne’s Centennial Exhibition, a grand, expansive, and enormously popular international affair.³ The Sydney events, on the other hand, have generally been seen as less than wholly successful. Stephen Shortus writes that 'perhaps the most noticeable feature of all the [Sydney] ceremonies was the lack of that “high national feeling” that had been sought.'⁴ The opening of Centennial Park has been used to demonstrate the failure of the Sydney organisers to realize the potential of the centenary.⁵ At the time of the opening, the park was dry and

¹ For accounts of the centennial events, see the Sydney Morning Herald; Graeme Davison et. al., Australians 1888, op. cit., pp. 10-18; AANSW papers, 9/2441.2; and Stephen Shortus, ‘Retrospection: Attitudes to the Past in New South Wales in the 1880s’, M.A. thesis, Macquarie University, 1970, ch. III.
² Sydney Morning Herald, 25 January 1888, [no page number].
⁵ See, for example, Australians 1888, op. cit., p. 12.
almost treeless. The *Sydney Morning Herald* reported Carrington’s dedication of the park ‘to the enjoyment of the people of New South Wales’, but noted that ‘seen, as it is at present, in a partially finished state, the park only indicates in a shadowy manner the outlines of its future beauty’.1

The organisers of Sydney’s 1938 sought to build a more successful occasion around the imperial presence of Phillip. Indeed, the 26 January re-enactment of his landing, and his later procession through the city streets at the head of an enormous pageant, bears more than passing resemblance to Henry’s landing at Port Melbourne and subsequent triumphal motorcade into the city. My view is that in the absence of a royal personage, Phillip served the purpose of inaugurating the main period of celebration. Historical spectacle took the place—we may guess—of royal spectacle.

1938, then, is an unusual case. In its apparently conventional imperial emphases, it falls within the mainstream of late nineteenth and early twentieth century official celebrations. In its reliance on historical spectacle it is singular.

Recognising Phillip’s place in this anniversary helps to clarify what is distinctive about it. It also enables us to understand the political context of the 1938 events more clearly. Phillip’s principal rôle was as an imperial governor: the implications of that were manifold. As a governor figure, he was drawn into some of the most contentious political arguments of the thirties. This does not, I think, stretch the significance of Phillip’s governorship beyond its actual limits: we must remember that the office had an important symbolic function. The office had real power and authority, but it was also seen as a signifier of empire. The governor was always ‘the visible link’, an index of the larger relationship, and a historical governor was no less so.

I have already suggested that the complexity of Phillip’s historical reputation owes something to the differences between what could be called ‘economic’ and ‘constitutional’ views of his significance. In the 1930s, however, it was made more complex still by the immediate political situation in New South Wales and overseas. While Phillip’s status as a founder and builder of white Australia was certainly debated by historians, his position in history as a military autocrat and imperial representative had a wider ambiguity. ‘Economic’ and ‘constitutional’ issues collided in New South Wales in the Depression. When Jack Lang announced the ‘Lang Plan’ and stopped interest payments to overseas

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1 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 January 1888, p. 3.
lenders, the State became a rather less valuable acquisition. An imperial ‘money power’ was an easy political target for Lang in 1931 and 1932, after the humiliation of Niemeyer and the Melbourne Agreement.  

Issues of empire arise directly from Phillip’s speech in the 1938 re-enactment, and I will discuss them in that context. The problem of autocracy is also raised again later in the chapter, by those who saw in Phillip’s Governorship proto-nationalist inclinations as well as empire-building, and democratic tendencies in conflict with the exercise of autocratic power.

A further, if obvious, point should be made about the relationship between the position of governor and the politics of autocracy and democracy. Confidence in the conventional constitutional history of a steady progress towards liberal democracy was challenged in the thirties: by the dismissal of Lang’s elected government by a governor of New South Wales, one of Phillip’s successors, in 1932; and by the success of fascism in Europe. Inevitably, the question was asked: since Australian history offered a precedent for military rule, how secure might Australian democracy be in fraught local and international circumstances?

Here H.V. Evatt’s studies of law and colonial history are relevant, although they are not about Phillip himself. They show how an analysis of the position of Governor was central to a treatment of these political and constitutional threats in Australia, and they offer instances of both regressive and progressive vice-regal actions. Evatt’s account of the 1932 crisis concluded that the scope of the royal prerogative was ill-defined. Game had acted because he considered the government’s actions illegal, but that was a matter for the courts to determine rather than himself. Evatt defended the actions of earlier governors in other works: Rum Rebellion (1938), about the overthrow of Bligh, and Injustice Within the Law (1937), about the Tolpuddle martyrs. Rum Rebellion is of most importance here: it analyses the legal struggle between Bligh, Macarthur, and the New South Wales Corps officers involved in the events of 1808. But for Evatt this dispute was of much more than legal significance: the interests of a powerful and corrupt clique were ranged against those of small, free settlers, who, with Bligh’s support, fought to reform the colony’s oppressive political economy.

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They wanted freedom of trade. They wanted the right to buy and sell commodities on the open market. They wanted Bligh to suppress the existing combinations and end their extortion. They wanted justice to be administered by the free inhabitants, not only by the military class. They wanted debts to be made payable solely in a stable currency....1

So from where had the challenge to the rule of law and due legal process come? From where had it come in 1932? From where had the challenge to justice come in the case of the Dorsetshire Labourers? Hartley Grattan’s foreword to *Rum Rebellion* drew the obvious conclusion: ‘whenever major social issues are involved, the law of the land is extremely apt to be subverted to the interests of the dominant class of the community’.2 The position of governor carried with it the potential to be both the instrument of that subversion and a shield against it.

My analysis in this chapter seeks to elaborate the complex political possibilities for this enigmatic historical identity, the visionary hero as governor. If Evatt stressed the danger of vice-regal autocracy, others reclaimed Phillip for democracy. If the public spectacle of the re-enactment conveyed a straightforward economic imperialism, other spectacles placed Phillip within a more diverse, contemporary historical context. If the Anniversary Day re-enactment was a powerful reduction of Australian history, another elaborated on that history, proposing a series of visionary heroes after Phillip. My argument pursues Phillip through the spectacles, film, iconography and biography of 1938.

The Re-enactment

As we have seen, Cramp was used as an authority on historical matters when the 1938 celebrations were being organised, and he was closely involved in planning the 26 January re-enactment. He wrote a speech for Phillip with heavy emphasis on imperial vision, including the line ‘the most valuable acquisition Britain ever made’. William Ifould, Principal Librarian at the State Library of New South Wales, took issue with Cramp’s interpretation, and wrote an alternative version which apparently did not attribute a vision to Phillip. Unfortunately this does not survive in the archives. But the minutes of the ‘Landing’ sub-

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2 Ibid., p. viii.
committee do survive, and it was this committee which decided between the two versions.

They record that Cramp insisted that he had 'carefully examined the historical records, and was satisfied that Phillip was a man of vision'. The sub-committee supported Cramp unanimously. Hugh Ward, a retired theatre executive, said that 'even if Mr Ifould's version was a truthful one, it lacked vision, and was utterly unsuitable for the occasion'. Colonel Murphy, the Secretary of the Royal Agricultural Society, 'was of the opinion that Mr Ifould's speech would not be favourably received by the public. He thought it would not serve any useful purpose in broadcasting a speech which lacked inspiration'.

Despite Cramp's testimony, the issue is clearly not a simple question of historical accuracy. Vision is important for other reasons, reasons to do with what will be suitable for the occasion, what will be well received by the public, what might be usefully broadcast. In the terms of historical spectacle, this makes sense. Organisers of the anniversary pageants had to make them work. They had to produce events which would appeal to their audiences, constituting an attractive encounter between people and history. But they had to do more than make the pageants appealing to the crowds. Crowds are always part of a spectacle, and never more so than in cultures with highly developed forms of mass communication. Think of how *Movietone News* reported other 1938 spectacles: 'People of all creeds gather in their thousands to give thanks for divine aid in the building of a nation.' 'The public hails a striking display of armed force mobilised for the protection of peace.' However large the crowds would be in Sydney on 26 January 1938, a bigger audience—the newspaper and magazine readerships, the radio and newsreel audiences—would see the spectacle represented as an interaction between event and people. The spectacle, including its immediate audience, had to be an attractive media event for the wider audience.

As we have seen, the communications and entertainment industries were as closely involved in the production of the 26 January spectacles as in recording them. A stand was built over the water at the edge of the area where the events after the landing would take place, so that photographers would be able to capture the spectacle from the best angle. It was a perspective which also gave them an excellent view of activities on the 'Supply', the landing itself, and the crowd in the

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1 'Landing' sub-committee minutes, eighth meeting, 26 November 1937, p. 3. AANSW 9/2444A.2.

background, on the slopes of Farm Cove. The implications of this final perspective are discussed below.

This incorporation of people into spectacles, if it goes well, is part of the pleasure of them, both for those who are actually there and for those who look at pictures of them later on. It is important to control the interaction. At one level this is a question of practical organisation, of formulating a strategy for dealing with the problems which will arise in any congregation of tens of thousands. In 1938 there was much discussion of how crowds would be managed in matters of parking, seating, policing and transport.1 The Sydney Daily Telegraph reported the modern methods being used under the headline 'RADIO TO CONTROL 150TH CROWDS / STREET AMPLIFIERS; PATROLS TO NOTIFY MOVEMENTS'.2 Behind these announcements was the recognition that the spectacle would not be one without the smoothly arranged participation of a big crowd.

At another level the participation of the audience in spectacle is something that must be managed by the drama itself. It is a question of what is performed and how. This brings us back to Phillip's speech. The problem facing the 1938 organisers was to make the re-enactment a popular encounter with heroic history. To do this they had to make Phillip himself attractive—not an easy task, given that a recent admiring biography had concluded 'He had no gift with people, no emotional gifts at all'.3 More: they had to make him inspirational. What was the nature of this 'inspiration' supposed to be? What were the implications of the committee's insistence on visionary content? Phillip's speech had to be the climax of the landing, although in 1788 it was not made until 7 February. Phillip's vision of the future was presented as the explanation for the settlement: in the re-enactment it was made more important than the actual act of landing itself.

This is how it happened: The pageant began at eight thirty in the morning, at Farm Cove, when the media and invited notables were in their places. They, and the crowds behind them, looked over an ostensibly natural performance space, equipped with a microphone disguised as a native plant. Twenty six Aborigines, brought by the organisers from Menindee and Brewarrina in western New South Wales, waited on a small constructed beach for the white men aboard a model of the 'Supply' moored offshore. The pageant timetable allowed them a five-minute corroboree, designed to 'suggest the condition of

1 See for example the Daily Telegraph, 20 January 1938, p. 1.
2 Ibid., 22 January, p. 1.
3 M.Barnard Eldershaw, Phillip of Australia, op. cit., p. 344.
affairs existing in the country prior to the arrival of the white population', as the Souvenir Programme said.¹ But this was not the only reason for the corroboree, or for the Aborigines' presence. The official archive suggests that the Aborigines were included in order to meet the demands of public spectacle. When the event had been planned, there was considerable debate about whether Aborigines should be involved. A decision had already been made not to to invite Pacific Islanders to take part in the celebrations: Claude Flemming's idea for a 'grand Pacific Corroboree' 'could not be entertained' by the Programme Committee in June 1936.² In July 1937, when the Programme Committee discussed Aboriginal participation, their minutes recorded that

some members [felt] that the services of aborigines should not be utilised, but that "whites" should impersonate native characters. It was pointed out, however, that aborigines would be a great attraction and if their services were utilised to the full and included a corroboree, it would materially add to the success of the occasion.³

So the Aborigines were involved not merely because their historical significance was recognised or misrecognised, but because they were also regarded as attractively strange, and because public spectacles need audiences.

When the marines landed, the Aborigines 'retired, brandishing their weapons, to hiding places', as the pageant's commentator put it.⁴ The prospects of an 'Indian' attack were then discussed by the marines, taking into account their 'treacherous traits'. Orders followed to ensure 'that no Indians remain skulking about'.⁵

¹ Pageants ... 1938 Souvenir Programme, [Sydney 1938], p. 7.
² Programme Committee minutes, 7th Meeting, 11 June 1936, AANSW 9/2442.
³ Programme Committee minutes, 23rd Meeting, 23 July 1937, AANSW 9/2442, p. 7.
⁵ See the dialogue quoted by G. Souter, op. cit., p. 17. A slightly different version is given in Ibid.
The Aborigines, however, were still on the scene when Phillip duly landed. Phillip wanted to 'make [his] peace with them', and he and others walked towards them. The commentator described what happened:

The natives are inclined to retreat into the bush, but one old man boldly steps out in front showing signs that he recognised the visitors as being friendly. Evidently by the uniform he remembered or had heard of the previous visit when Captain Cook landed at Botany Bay 18 years before.

The Commodore [Phillip] senses this recognition, and takes advantage of it by approaching the old man and placing round his neck a length of red cloth. He directs the Coxswain to present gifts to the others, but they regret [sic] behind the bushes and the gifts are left on the ground for them.¹

The occupation of the Cove was only a prelude. Up to this point the spectacle worked by compressing time, space and events. The first fleet

¹ 'Commentator's Announcement...', *op.cit.*, p. 11.
was reduced to one ship, the beach to a short strip of sand, Sydney Cove to a well defined patch of clear ground, hundreds of white settlers to perhaps two dozen, the aborigines to a small group of men, and contact to a stiff and stagey retreat and gift-giving.

When it came to Phillip's speech however, 'real time' was simulated. The judge-advocate read a proclamation, and Phillip began his speech thanking God:

I wish to take this opportunity, now that we are all assembled in this new land, to acknowledge, with thanks and humility, our debt to Providence for permitting the long voyage from the Homeland to be accomplished without the loss of a single vessel or the occurrence of any accident of a major character.

He also thanked 'all ranks and ratings for their good conduct and loyal support', and passed lightly over the dangers of the voyage: 'Although the anxiety fell mainly on my shoulders as the Officer in charge of the Fleet, it been shared to some extent by you all'. He went on:

It is now fitting that we should turn our minds to the purpose underlying this enterprise, which is to plant a fresh sprig of Empire in this new and vast land. It may be that this country will become the most valuable acquisition Britain has ever made.

It is, therefore, appropriate that I should express the vision which comes to me of a city stupendous in area and population, and of this magnificent harbour visited by merchantmen of all sizes, designs and nationalities, bringing goods for the growing population in this land and taking away the surplus produce of its soil. May the achievement of this little band of British people, separated by thousands of miles from kith and kin, lead to the creation of such a city. In my mind I see the inhabitants of this great country of the future reflecting with pride and gratitude upon an era of progress of which we this day lay the foundation.¹

Phillip turns to the convicts:

I am pleased to record that the majority of the prisoners under my care—I regret I cannot say all—have

¹ Governor Phillip's speech, typescript, AANSW 9/2444A.2, pp. 1-2.
given me a minimum of anxiety on the voyage from the Homeland. To them I suggest that they regard this settlement as affording the opportunity to rehabilitate themselves in the eyes of their fellow men.

By industry and good behaviour they may regain their freedom and the esteem of society of which they have deprived themselves.

By submission to those in authority they may escape what might be deemed the harshness of the law, and again lead practically a free life.

All will have certain tasks allotted to them, according to their ability and strength. I shall not permit the industrious ones to labour for the idle. Everyone must do his share of the work.

To those who desire to marry, every consideration will be given, but they must first conform with the laws of morality and religion.

In conclusion, it is my desire to promote the happiness and prosperity of all under my Government, and, with the co-operation of everyone here assembled, to render this settlement advantageous and honourable to our Homeland—Britain.¹

Phillip's vision was a dramatic, metaphysical way of articulating past and present. It is visionary history in that it presents itself as the source and the beginning of white Australian history, proposing the image of something which the achievement of first settlement will 'lead to'. The vision therefore claims a transformative power of its own. Phillip, moreover, does not explain where his vision comes from. He thanks God for the fleet's safe passage, but this is the only religious reference. His uncannily accurate description of the harbour, the crowds, modern Sydney in general, seems to me to have a supernatural quality: how otherwise could Phillip possibly know what Sydney would become? So there is an element of magic in this drama, despite what may be inferred from Karl Cramp's empirical assurances. The event was a secular epiphany.

There are three further points to be made. First, although what he calls his 'Government' has just been constituted, Phillip says very little about

how he will rule, or the political nature of the settlement, which is simply ‘a sprig of empire’. He is distanced from that political history. The significance of the speech in establishing Phillip’s state power is played down; his heroism is not linked with that power. But his humanity is revealed to his audience in his references to the convicts, whom he calls ‘prisoners’. His admission of legal harshness and encouraging promises of freedom, marriage and opportunity make a plain contrast with the threats reported in one of the sources of the speech, namely *The Voyage of Governor Phillip to Botany Bay*:

He then turned to the convicts, and distinctly explained to them the nature of their present situation. The greater part, he bade them recollect, had already forfeited their lives to the justice of their country: yet, by the lenity of its laws, they were now so placed that, by industry and good behaviour, they might in time regain the advantages and estimation in society of which they had deprived themselves. They not only had every encouragement to make that effort, but were removed almost entirely from every temptation to guilt. There was little in this infant community which one man could plunder from another, and any dishonest attempts in so small a society would almost infallibly be discovered. To persons detected in such crimes he could not promise any mercy....

Secondly, the re-created Phillip not only posits a general relation between the nation’s past and its present, but also refers to the specific situation of his 1938 audience. By involving them in his vision he gives his history a populist dimension. Visionary history puts all its eggs in one basket—it can be popular and powerful history only if its hero is popular and powerful. Here Phillip seems to be turning his audience’s attention away from himself. He not only suggests that the people before him ‘reflect with pride’, he invites them to observe themselves from his perspective. In this spectacle they and their city can change places with the illusory Phillip in front of them, becoming the objects of vision while he becomes the spectator, describing what he sees. The spectacle manipulates Mackaness’s opposition between hero and people, but the opposition remains.

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1 *The Voyage of Governor Phillip to Botany Bay*, Sydney 1970, p. 35. *The Voyage*, first published in 1789, was a compilation of despatches and journal entries by Phillip and others. It is not regarded as an authoritative source for Phillip’s speech, but was clearly used in 1938.
This momentary reversal involves a certain subordination of the audience to Phillip. The crowd can take pleasure in their image—the image of proud and grateful inhabitants of a great city. They can take pleasure also in the historical significance which attaches to themselves as the objects of Phillip's prophetic imagination. But in finding such pleasures in the occasion, they acknowledge the pivotal difference between themselves and Phillip, the difference between the visionary individual and the people or things which are the objects of his vision. By looking at themselves in this way they also become a sign—a metonym—of Phillip's modern Australia. They locate themselves, though perhaps only briefly, in Phillip's historical schema, wherein they and the rest of the 'stupendous' city are the results of Phillip's transformative foresight. The appeal of the spectacle seems to lie partly in this dramatic, narcissistic incorporation of the crowd.

Thirdly, Phillip's speech can be placed in an economic frame, which is also political. As in Flanagan's version, his prophecy is essentially economic; unlike that version, this one picks out narrowly imperial signs of economic progress, rather than the conventional milk and honey. Before his reference to 'the inhabitants of this great country of the future', the emphases are on trade and the material links with empire. Domestic prosperity is ignored: Phillip's perspective on Australia is specifically that of a metropolitan power in a world economy. 'Bringing goods... taking away the surplus produce....' Sydney is an entrepôt; its culture is its economy. This was not an exceptional idea. A passage in Charles Melaun's novelisation of The Squatter's Daughter suggests the full conventional weight of that image of merchantmen in the harbour. An old Queensland squatter is returning to Australia after many years in the 'old country'. Entering Sydney Harbour in a mail-boat, he admires the scene imagined by Phillip: 'Did you ever see anything more magnificent than those?' he asks his companion, pointing to some ships.

Cartwright looked amused. 'Tramps?' he smiled.

'No', protested the old man. 'Treasure ships! They made that Bridge possible—and more, they made Australia possible, taking our wool to the world.' Sherington's pointing arm indicated the line of wharves where more and more ships were loading with thousands of bales of wool, as fast as cranes could hoist the precious cargo. 'Look over there, Cartwright!' There was pride and deep feeling in the old squatter's voice.
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‘Wool—wool! the spirit of this nation is interwoven with it. To me, my friend, it’s life.’

The concrete imperial sense of the ‘the most valuable acquisition Britain ever made’ line is easy to overlook, partly because it is so obvious, but also because the line is so firmly shown as belonging to history, something Governor Phillip said. If we accept the line, we might interpret it as eighteenth century imperial rhetoric. If we do not accept it, we interpret it as a 1930s misrepresentation of eighteenth century imperial rhetoric. But it is possible that the line is not a reference to the eighteenth century. The meaning could be: Australia is—not was but is, in 1938—the most valuable acquisition the Empire ever made, and this is what Phillip foresaw in 1788. It is not an overstatement to say that this is what Australian empire loyalists of the 1930s wanted to believe, and also wanted Britain to believe. In his promise of a restoration of relations between Australia and Britain, Phillip appears here as an ideal imperial governor. His speech disposes of the disastrous debt crisis of 1930, promising a flow of trade and investment.

A recent essay by John O’Brien provides a succinct account of Australian and British relations during the period, concentrating on what were vexed trade issues after the advantageous—for Australia—1932 Ottawa Agreement. In 1936-37 Britain took just under half of all Australia’s exports, and this figure had increased over the decade. But there was an important difference in the imperialisms of Australian and British governments: ‘In Australian eyes there was total harmony between Australia’s own economic interests and those of the British Empire’. Australia regarded imperial sentiment as the basis for an imperial economic policy, securing preferential treatment for Australian exports to Britain; Britain, on the other hand, regarded imperial sentiment as ‘a substitute for economic concessions’.

This difference became clearest shortly after the 1938 celebrations ended, when Australian attempts to renegotiate Ottawa failed dismally. Australian government leaders held unrealistic ideas about Britain’s economic rôle. O’Brien quotes the President of the British Board of Trade commenting on the 1938 Australian proposals: ‘The logical outcome of the Australian requests [is] that the Empire should establish

1 The Squatter’s Daughter, Sydney 1933, pp. 29-30.
3 Ibid., p. 577.
a closed economy in which the Dominions would provide the agriculture and the United Kingdom the industry.' He imagined that 'no one would want that'.¹ 'That' was not the position of the 1938 celebrations, which revelled in steel mills, mines and wheat fields without sectoral discrimination. But O'Brien's analysis reminds us that imperial enthusiasm was not an ideological husk: empire was assigned an absolute material importance.

Yet it would also be mistaken to see this imperialism as no more than economic self-interest, on the part of either Australians in general or those in particular who materially benefited from preferential treatment of their goods in the British market. In his remarkable essay 'Japan or Manchester?' Frederic Benham, a Professor of Commerce at the University of London, was writing in 1938 that the Australian emphasis on imperial trade was misplaced. Britain, he thought, could not remain an expanding market for Australian primary products: its own increasing production of food, and its relations with 'foreign' exporters such as Argentina would see to that. Although Britain did give preferences to Australian exports, these were less valuable than was generally thought, because the production of most of these goods was actually subsidised by Australian consumers, 'many of whom', Benham wrote, 'are relatively poor'.²

The policy had and would continue to effectively reduce Australian standards of living. It was not even the case that agricultural subsidies assisted producers in general: 'they benefit two or three particular groups, and much of this benefit goes to landowners and is obtained, to a considerable extent, at the expense of the main body of primary producers.'³ Benham's argument was that Australia would be better off in the long term concentrating on trade with Japan and East Asia. He was writing two years after the Australian Government had launched an extraordinary attack on imports from Japan and the United States, essentially, according to Benham, in order to preserve the British market for Australian goods. But it was along those imperial lines that the transformation envisaged by Phillip was directed.

Phillip's speech had a wider imperial significance. His promise was a reassurance for that whole Australian elite—part of the New South Wales government's own constituency—which was so closely and in so many ways attached to Britain. That elite was inevitably disturbed by

¹ Ibid., p. 585.
³ Ibid., p. 165.
Britain's diminishing power to influence world events and to compete in the international economy with the newer industrial economies: the United States, Germany, and, in the Pacific region, Japan. A wide group of Australians were part of this group; what Richard White aptly calls an 'empire culture' was deeply entrenched in local professional and business life.1 Australian governments attended to the deliberations of Westminster and Whitehall; the higher levels of Australian finance and commerce borrowed money from London; Australian intellectuals received their final training in English universities; Australian law was a small and subordinate part of the English legal system; Australian journalism reported world events via Fleet Street; and the most powerful protestant church was the Church of England.

Across all those institutional and affective networks of attachment and identification, there was a genuine belief that Australian interests were best served by an exclusive imperial relationship, and that therefore Australia's future lay within the empire. The degree to which Australia's rulers were able to sustain that belief is most clearly indicated not by their attitude to trade, but by their confidence in Britain's ability to protect Australia from attack. In 1938 Japan's war in Asia continued, while in Europe the settlements of 1919-20 were already irrelevant. Yet the Federal United Australia Party government made no preparations for war, and when war came, it proclaimed 'business as usual'. Such was the faith in empire, until 1941.

Phillip's speech was a complex articulation of past and present. It suggests specific historical relationships between heroic governor, state, economy, people, and empire. But how could this visionary history provide an account of white Australian history? An anniversary film relied entirely on the visionary, heroic interpretation of history: A Nation is Built, produced for the New South Wales Government by the legendary photographer Frank Hurley. This is worth examining in detail.

**Heroic History in Film**

'To see clearly is poetry, prophecy, and religion,—all in one'

John Ruskin2

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A Nation is Built is a black and white documentary, forty-nine minutes long. The film is a celebration of its subject matter, the one hundred and fifty years of Australian history between 1788 and 1938. It opens with a small sailing ship making its way across Sydney Harbour. ‘From so small a beginning has sprung the virile Australian nation’ the titles announce. ‘A climate without peer, fabulous natural resources, unsurpassed scenery and limitless sporting facilities combine to make Australia the natural setting for the new Anglo-Saxon Empire under the Southern Cross.’ The film presents history as triumphant and glorious destiny, a vision of wealth and power with divine guarantees. A Nation is Built presents Australian history as the future, and sets out to discover the future in the past.

But the film is part of a number of histories, and is also the place where different histories intersect. It is part of film history, a product of Cinesound, the Australian studio which made a series of successful feature films in the 1930s. It was written, photographed and produced by Frank Hurley, who had worked on earlier Cinesound features, and then established a documentary unit within the company. He worked on commission, making industrial films and travelogues, including two celebrating the South Australian centenary of 1936, Oasis and Here is Paradise, as well as A Nation is Built. John Tulloch has illuminated many aspects of the Australian film industry in the decade in his book Australian Cinema: Industry, Narrative and Meaning. Tulloch’s comments on two forms of film spectacle still influential in the thirties, spectacle-display and spectacle-documentary, provide a useful background to Hurley’s work.1

Spectacle-documentary, the convention of the ‘scenic’, informed Hurley’s interest in panoramic views of scenes such as mountains, factories and Sydney Harbour. One characteristic of the panoramic view which Tulloch comments on is its ‘non-directive’ nature: it presents a scene which the audience may scan and from which it can select objects of special interest. Its members are therefore visually privileged agents, exercising their desire to see what can be seen. I will argue later that while A Nation is Built exploits this desire, it also constrains its audiences’ visual privilege in important ways. Spectacle-display, the tradition of vaudeville and revue, is used in a number of scenes in A Nation is Built, notably one of tourists dancing in a Blue Mountains car park. This kind of scene was accepted by cinema audiences in the twenties as a conventional and sometimes extended form of digression within a film, or else as a live prologue; but in the thirties it was increasingly incorporated with narrative. Since the narrative

1 Sydney 1982, pp. 153-60.
framework of *A Nation is Built* is rudimentary at best, Hurley’s ‘display’ scenes may be better seen as illustrations of an argument about history which runs right through the film.

Hurley’s own history is the subject of several biographies, none of which quite do justice to his strange career as a mobile, resourceful and entrepreneurial photographer driven by a desire for muscular adventure. His work for Cinesound in the thirties has been passed over by several biographers, who have preferred to concentrate on the more ‘adventurous’ parts of his life, in Antarctica, New Guinea and elsewhere. Even so, it was in the thirties that Hurley did his first extended work on the Australian landscape—the subject of much of *A Nation is Built*. Hurley’s vision of the land was not a new way of seeing it, but an influential one enmeshed in powerful ideology. Material from a number of Hurley’s earlier Cinesound pictures was included in *A Nation is Built*. Among these films are *Oasis, Orphan of the Wilderness,* and I think *Vulcan’s Crucible, Symphony in Steel* and *Treasures of Katoomba*. There are probably others.

For our purposes, the film is above all part of the history of commemorative celebrations. In this context, *A Nation is Built* was a spectacle among other spectacles, among pageants representing Australian history as a progression of elaborate tableaux, exhibitions depicting not only the past but—for example—the productive work of school children. These included military reviews, fireworks, historic re-enactments, and Anzac Day marches. Film executives, theatre owners, newspaper editors and others from the communications industries were closely involved in planning most of these events. Like those others, *A Nation is Built* was paid for by the New South Wales government. Although it purports to describe a ‘nation’ it is almost entirely devoted to New South Wales.

But unlike other spectacles *A Nation is Built* seems curiously unpolished. Hurley’s film is a disjointed, even fragmentary, amalgam. It has three parts: the first is an account of the ‘foundation-layers’ of Australia, the second an ‘excursion’ surveying industrial ‘nation building’ in 1938, and the third is a scenic tour of parts of southern New South Wales. The divisions between these sections appear as sharp disjunctions in the film. Although the first section is fictionally constructed, no attempt was made to link it to the second section in narrative. The break between the ‘excursion’ and the ‘holiday’ is equally abrupt and inexplicable. Other things emphasise these disconnections: the film’s music is occasionally out of keeping with its visual content: a martial brass band plays over scenes of a crowded beach, for example. Shifts of scene within sections are often awkward, especially where parts of other films are being patched in. This is ironic, given the film’s
emphasis on constant and vigorous physical movement, both within scenes and in the film’s movement from place to place.

Since the film’s first section is all about visionary history it needs to be described in some detail. It begins with slow pans over the Grose Valley in the Blue Mountains, accompanied by Elgar’s ‘Pomp and Circumstance’. One impressive sandstone cliffline dissolves into another; the camera passes over the cliffs, past a lonely obelisk, and settles on a family picnicking in front of their impressive late model car.

A Nation is Built: the family picnic

A small boy is putting candles in a cake: ‘One hundred and forty-eight, one hundred and forty nine, one hundred and fifty! Hey Mother, I bet Governor Phillip never had a cake like this!’ ‘No my dear, it was a very different sort of cake that he had to share with his early settlers, wasn’t it Father?’ Father talks —he has a southern English accent—about the hardships of the early settlers, while the family make supportive, corroborative comments:

Daughter: If it weren’t for Governor Phillip we wouldn’t be keeping up our country’s birthday now.
Visionary History

Mother: Yes my dear, Lord Sydney chose the right man to to extend the British Empire in Australia.

The family sits in a semicircle in front of their car, the children around their mother, who is a solid figure in the thirties style of mothers. Their father, wearing a cardigan, sits on the right, reading from his history book. He shows them a picture of Phillip and a row of tents surrounded by trees; the picture animates. This is the first of the film’s key visionary scenes, and the most important: the whole film hinges on it. Phillip and his Judge-Advocate Collins are discussing the prospects of the new settlement. Phillip looks past the camera, and announces his conviction that this place will ‘become the most valuable acquisition Great Britain ever made.’ Ghostly skyscrapers rise above the gumtrees; then the scene fades and we are back in the mountains. ‘It’s wonderful, John, how Governor Phillip’s dreams have materialised’ says Mother.

As in the Anniversary Day spectacle, there is no attempt to explain how Phillip visualised the future; it is enough simply to reproduce this supernatural ability with a special effect. This is how the film’s teleological history proceeds: from the extraordinary prophecy of one patriarch to another, recalled through another.
Father tells his family about Macarthur and Marsden, who ‘laid the foundations of our great national wool industry’. Once more the image in the book takes us back, this time to Camden, where the Captain, the Reverend and their wives are standing in a field discussing the prospects for primary industry:

(Chuckling, laughter)
Macarthur: Well Marsden, as a clergyman you’re a most successful sheep breeder!

(Laughter)
Rev. Marsden: A little unorthodox, perhaps!

(Laughter)
Mrs Marsden: But the diversion is most enlightening and beneficial...
Rev. Marsden: ...to the colony my dear!
Macarthur: And the privy purse also, hmm?
Rev. Marsden: The official stipend needs augmenting!

(Laughter)
Macarthur: By the way, how did you fare with your last clip?
Rev. Marsden: Hmm, most satisfying. It realised top prices in London, and was classed equal to the finest Saxon.
Macarthur (urgently): Good news. If we can increase the export of wool of such quality, it would develop the colony to a great destiny.
Mrs Macarthur: Quite so, but how are we going to increase our pasture?
Rev. Marsden: Ah, dear lady, that is the problem. Where are we going to find good pastures, among all these rugged mountains that hem us in?

Shot of steep mountain slopes

Shot of Macarthur

Macarthur (slowly, emphatically): Well, it’s my belief that beyond those mountains are lands so boundless that no limits can be placed upon the fine wool sheep that can be raised.

Dad takes the tale up once more. ‘Macarthur’s prophetic words were realised by Blaxland, Wentworth and Lawson. They crossed the mountain barrier, and opened up new vistas of greatness for our country’. It is significant that the family are picnicking in these same mountains, the threshold of those boundless lands. It turns out that they are eating within view of the obelisk where the three explorers ‘stood when they viewed the promised land’. It is significant that greatness is a vista: as always in this film, the emphasis is on vision and the object of vision. Nation builders do not have a sense of sight so much as a faculty of vision, a faculty not for recognising things but for supernatural transformation.
A brief scene then depicts a pioneering family travelling the promised land, while an orchestra plays ‘Advance Australia Fair’ and Mum recites part of Paterson’s ‘Song of the Future’:

...They could not rest in settled land  
Their faces ever westward bent  
Beyond the farthest settlement  
Responding to the challenge cry  
Of ‘better country farther out’.1

But this quickly gives way to Dad’s lecture on Farrer and wheat farming. We are taken back to Farrer’s laboratory, where he is discussing his successful research with a journalist—the only person in the film, incidently, with an Australian accent. ‘Well that will enable Australia to take a place among the wheat growing nations of the world.’ Farrer looks into the camera: ‘It is my objective that Australia will not only take her place among the wheat growing nations, but will lead the world in standards of quality.’ Dad comments: ‘So Farrer turned millions of idle acres into productivity.’

All this takes us up to ‘the revolutionary age of steam’, but here Dad breaks off his account of the ‘foundation-layers’, telling us that the rest is ‘a story for another day’. The sound of a steam engine introduces a male voice-over commentary, a voice-of-God which moves promptly on to a long list of trade statistics. The commentary says that this is the beginning of ‘an excursion’, but without elaboration. The rest of the film is indeed a journey around New South Wales, but one with little apparent sense of direction. Hurley had planned to provide at least a skeletal link between the early nineteenth century and 1938, in the form of a sequence of shots of different steam engines, beginning with the first Australian train in 1850, and ending with the modern trains of the twentieth century. This idea was abandoned. The disjunction between the film’s first and second parts establishes a basic opposition between the past and the present, which denies the possibility of a significant recent history. The consequences of this closure of history become apparent as the film proceeds.

If anything holds A Nation is Built together it is the early visionary scenes. The prophecies of the nation-builders have a sacred quality: they emerge from a book, prefigure the film’s later content, and are recalled towards the end. Vision, not action, defines nation builders. The section of the film which depicts Sydney makes this clear. The camera lingers

1 From this passage of the poem the film omits the line ‘But taking each his life in hand’—perhaps a slight dilution of the pioneers’ heroism—and changes ‘would’ to ‘could’.
over public statuary honouring famous explorers. ‘Immortalised in stone, those who have played a notable part in building the nation look down from the facade of the Lands Building... From Hyde Park, Captain Cook gazes towards the entrance to Sydney Harbour...’ These scenes follow a montage designed to emphasise the speed and density of modern Sydney. The film moves from cars and trains on the bridge to city crowds, shot from knee level, from just above their heads, and from roof tops. The city is presented as the site of masses in constant movement, stressing again the opposition between past and present. This juxtaposition is clearly shown as a contrast between the open terrain of the visionary individual, and the crowded, occupied, moving spaces of masses and numbers.

Individual contemporary persons are shown very rarely in this film. Individuality is historical. Collective activity is the sign of modernity. In his bush scenes, Hurley has no interest in the cliche of the lonely figure surrounded by trees: he occupies the screen with groups of singers, dancers, walkers and skiers. He prefers activity and organisation: a beach scene culminates in shots of marching life-savers; visitors to the Blue Mountains dance in formation.
It is not only massed humanity which signifies the present—sheep occupy the rural landscape of *A Nation is Built* in huge numbers, as they did in the opening to *The Squatter's Daughter*. When the commentary introduces the men on the land, the grazier, sheep breeder, wheat grower and dairy man (sic), we are not shown them, but, in each case, their stock. There is movement at the station—and everywhere else. Wheels, trains, cars, boats, machines and water rush past. Mountains collapse and trees fall to the ground. Livestock of all kinds form a dynamic pattern in the grand parade at the Sydney show. Despite their relative stillness, orchards, banana plantations, and fields of wheat echo these images of order, repetition and plenty. At the level of the commentary, a flood of statistics heralds modernity.

So the Australian cornucopia is traced back to a few notable individuals. What is interesting here is not the fact that Hurley's history excludes aboriginal people, women, and the labour movement, but how it does so. The structure of Hurley's history precluded or diminished his recognition of collective historical agency in general. The commemorative celebrations of the thirties often honoured 'the pioneers', for example. Some versions of the pioneer myth were individualistic; but some emphasised democratic, egalitarian traditions, seeing the pioneers' collective impact on Australia as historically central. Hurley, however, gives the pioneers a subordinate place in his view of the past. One of the early visionary scenes tells us that 'Farrer turned millions of idle acres into productivity. ... The fulfilment of his vision called for grit and determination on the part of the settlers.' While the film attributes life to its visionary heroes, it emphasises the Anzacs' mortality; it is their memory which the Memorial in Hyde Park 'preserves imperishably'.

The film ends with a beautifully photographed scene of a wheat field.
The wheat recalls Farrer’s words: ‘[Australia] will lead the world in standards of quality’. A mechanical harvester advances towards and then past the camera, which fixes on the gently tossing wheat. The commentary breaks in, first urgent, and then, as ‘Land of Hope and Glory’ fades up, emphatic and portentous:

Nor are our people unmindful of the beneficence which has been showered down upon our land by the Creator of all things. This lovely scene inspires us with something more than mere admiration. The bounty of the earth impels us to look up to the goodwill that is in the heavens and to say ‘We thank Thee’. Just as those of the past had visions of the greatness of the future, so we, the builders of today, must build towards our nation’s mightiness of the morrow. In harmony and concord our voices are raised: God that made thee mighty, *make thee mightier yet!*

In the last moments the wheat dissolves into a crowd of onward marching children. ‘God that made thee mighty, make thee mightier yet!’ is taken up by a swelling chorus and orchestra. More so than in the public spectacle of the re-enactment, Australian history here is a kind of religious history, possessing all the contradictions inherent in a tale attempting to be transcendent, heroic and populist all at once. How can
people in 1938 be nation builders when the film has identified nation building only with a few heroes? Why should people be nation builders if God will make them mightier? What the film really asks of its audience is faith: we must believe the promises of those vaguely sacred visionaries, and have confidence in the goodwill of God.

A Nation is Built: the children emerge from the wheat

The metaphor of the harvest is a reminder nevertheless that mightiness also depends on trade, on those ‘seventy seven million bushels [of wheat] valued at fourteen million pounds’ that the commentary has told us were exported the year before. The film’s ending demonstrates again the truth of Phillip’s and Farrer’s words by showing the audience the content of their visions. The masses of people, numbers, and commodities which constitute modernity are shown as passive quantities, harvests reaped from other people’s visions. They lack histories of their own: Hurley has closed the past off from them.

While this final scene recalls the specifically economic content of Phillip’s vision of a ‘most valuable acquisition’, it also reminds us of the important aesthetic dimension which the vision possesses. Behind and above the wheat field are hills and spectacular clouds; the harvesters move over it in rhythmic patterns, towards and away from the camera.
The transformation of the land which the visionaries foresaw is not presented as a revolutionary change, but as one in accord with God and nature. The film makes this claim repeatedly: irrigation, for example, is said to have changed 'the desert's dusky face ... to a garden of Eden'; Sydney Harbour combines 'peerless beauty with commercial utility'; in another scene the camera descends from a group of clouds above Canberra to reveal Parliament House. Clouds and sunlight are used without restraint to signify this transcendent ideal, as Charles Chauvel used them mystically in his 1935 feature *Heritage*, as a sign both of the passing of time, and of the pioneering spirit's transcendence of it. 'When the sun pierces the clouds with pencil rays, ineffable peace falls.' The film's aesthetic is absolutely romantic, seeking to harmonise present and past, culture and nature, economy and religion.

Hurley skilfully used pictorial and naturalistic conventions to communicate this harmony. He preferred not to move the camera; he used extremely deep focus; he commonly backlit scenes, and either framed them with a foreground or chopped the foreground out; he composed frames which draw the eye to the centre, and he blocked
vanishing points with monumental backgrounds.\(^1\) The trade magazine *Film Weekly* deferentially praised the ‘artistic magnificence of the backgrounds’, and gave Hurley a place ‘in the front line of the world’s great camera artists’.\(^2\) The *Sun* newspaper commented on the film’s ‘high plane of artistry’, which made ‘old scenes become new and entrancing again’, especially Broken Hill, which ‘becomes breathtaking in its magnitude and wealth-making capacity.’\(^3\)

These spectacular images and sequences have a clear reference back to the early visionary scenes. Their romantic perspectives make the visions visible. But they fit together roughly, inserted into the rudimentary narrative frames of the ‘excursion’ and the ‘holiday’. Despite their awkwardness, these narrative frames are necessary in the terms of the film, since they specify the otherwise unspecified position of the audience. Although the film operates as spectacle, and therefore depends on providing its audience with a privileged perspective on the world, it is interesting that it imposes these crude diegetic conditions — effected, that is, at the cost of the film’s narrative ‘flow’—on the audience’s privilege.

There are also visual conditions. In some of his panoramic shots, for example, Hurley does occasionally give the audience a view which seems ‘almost to encompass the infinite’.\(^4\) The Sydney sequence of the film includes several panoramic views, including at an early point a view of Sydney through the clouds from an aeroplane high in the sky. As the sequence progresses, however, the panoramas are specifically identified with certain figures: the view of the city ends at Government House, where we meet the vice-regal family, who direct our attention to the view of the bridge. This scene then leads into the montage which ends with Cook’s statue, pointing us to the harbour he misrecognised. Cook and the vice-regal family place the audience at one remove from full, unmediated enjoyment of these views. In order to see, we have to adopt their point of view, we have to see what they see.

At other points our attention is directed to detail. A panorama shows a wide plain with sheep moving across it, but the broad view quickly changes to a sequence of shots of particular sheep and particular

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1 For an account of Hurley’s photographic style, see David P. Millar, *From Snowdrift to Shellfire*, Darlinghurst 1984, pp. 144-5.
2 17 February 1938, p. 18.
4 Steve Neale’s description of the panoramas of cloud and sky which open *Triumph of the Will* — Notes on Documentary and Spectacle*, *Screen*, 20, 1, Spring 1979, pp. 63-86. I borrow the phrase merely because it seems a good one to describe the pleasure cinema audiences may sometimes take in panorama.
activities associated with grazing, accompanied by a remorseless flow of statistics. At Kiama one of our holiday companions helpfully points to the blowhole. At Broken Hill the commentary tirelessly tells us where to look: ‘Look you can see it... this remarkable picture shows the red hot ladle... here comes the goldsmith....’

Like the masses of people and things in the film, the audience is taken to be passive. We are shown visionary Australia in ruthless detail; there is to be no question of our own ways of seeing it, no confusion about who the visionaries are. Of the many figures who are depicted seeing within the film, visionary heroes and families are shown as solid and securely based; the family on the Blue Mountains and Cook on his pedestal are examples. Women, divorced from families and crowds, however, admire views from the edges of precipices. They are not only passive but endangered viewers.

Other Spectacles

_A Nation is Built_ is an extreme film in the degree to which it subordinates both its audience and its own construction of the Australian people. It goes further along the track marked out in the re-enactment of Phillip’s landing. The film proposes not a history in the form of narrative progression but simply a spare set of relationships between past and present, represented by the different panoramic perspectives of the historical visionary patriarch and his modern audience. It elaborates these relationships as relations of power, perhaps even domination, to use Mackaness’s word. In both the re-enactment and the film, the visionary hero provides the attendant populace with much more than an account of its origin: in the hero’s encompassing gaze the very image of these spectators is determined. The politics of this history is not to do with who or what is included or excluded, since this is a history which may finally encompass everything in its panoramic scope. The politics is in the actual technique being used to invoke history, in the device of heroic vision, and in the peculiar relationship between past and present entailed.

This at least is what _A Nation is Built_ appears to suggest. Yet it is notable that Phillip was not always the central figure in the popular historical spectacles of 1938. Nor was visionary history always used as the explanation for everything; in pageants such as ‘Australia’s March to Nationhood’ pioneers, led by Phillip, were the key agents of progress. Heroic history had its limits; the very staged formality of the relations it proposed required a tightly controlled spectacle. The singular hero always had to be at the centre. In the Farm Cove re-enactment and key
scenes in *A Nation is Built* a structural austerity stands in contrast with the plenitude being invoked. But in more elaborate displays it was not possible to sustain either the centrality of Phillip’s position or the cool imperialism of his vision. Consider the form of the Anniversary Gala Night held at the Sydney Show Ground on the evening of 26 January 1938: after a series of conventional ‘displays’ involving organisations like the Fire Brigades and the Light Horse and floats from the ‘March to Nationhood’ pageant, the arena was blacked out, and a single, ‘strong, clear voice’ was heard:

Fellow Australians, let me take you back in spirit to this glorious day 150 years ago.

I will let you hear a wonderful prophecy that has been fulfilled, a prophecy published in England in 1789. It described Captain Arthur Phillip’s wonderful voyage to Australia, and the nymph ‘Hope’ supposed to be standing on the rocks bordering Sydney Cove, now Circular Quay.

Meanwhile the ‘Foundation Layers’ Float’ has emerged from the darkness into the centre of the arena. The float depicts Australian pioneers, a family on the frontier. But the voice continues with Erasmus Darwin’s prophetic nymph:

There shall broad streets their stately walls extend,  
The circus widen and the Crescent blend;  
There rayed from Cities O’er the cultured land  
Shall bright Canals and solid roads expand.  
There the proud Arch colossus-like bestride  
Yon glittering streams and bound the chafing tide...

While this is being recited ‘aborigines come upon the scenes’, as the *Official Souvenir Programme* put it.1 They perform a corroboree, as they did at ‘Sydney Cove’ earlier in the day, until the boom of a cannon ‘brings them to a dramatic halt’ in the centre of the arena. Marines followed by sailors and officers chase the Aborigines ‘to the far end of the arena, where dramatic action continues’. A drum and fife band announces Phillip’s approach to the central float. Phillip and his officers give the aborigines some presents. The marines form a circle around the float, and the ceremony proceeds as it did earlier in the day, with Collins’s proclamation and Phillip’s speech, delivered from the Foundation Layers float.

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With the lights focussed on Phillip, the people from all the other floats and displays—among them firemen, Britannia, soldiers, life savers, ‘beautiful Australian girls in colourful costumes [representing] the birds of Australia’—enter the field and encircle Phillip. These people represent every aspect of Australia, from primary industries and sunshine to music and the conquest of the air. They are revealed when Phillip concludes and the marines fire a volley. The Light Horse gallop around the edge of the arena, forming up in an outline of Australia. Gladys Moncrieff sings ‘Land of Hope and Glory’ and another gun is fired. Moncrieff then begins ‘God Save the King’, and is joined by massed bands and the entire assembly. The lights dim while spotlights pick out a Union Jack, bells peal, and another salute is fired.

The Gala Night condenses history just as A Nation is Built and the Farm Cove re-enactment and the ‘Australia’s March to Nationhood’ pageant did, but to a greater degree, transforming the landing into the only event in Australian history, and Phillip’s speech into the revelation of everything. The Gala Night appears to be the most concise expression of heroic history, a ‘classical’ instance of the form. But in collapsing together the Farm Cove re-enactment and the March to Nationhood, the Gala Night presents such an excessive collocation of Australian images that the formal relations proposed by visionary history seem unsustainable. The film and the re-enactment were visions of the Australian ‘commanding economy’, to use Jill Matthews’ phrase; but the Gala Night attempted to draw into Phillip’s heroic ambit Toe H., the A.I.F., a female allegorical figure of Peace ‘enthroned beneath a canopy of beautiful flowers, whilst lambs gambol about in an idyllic setting’, the Madonna and Child, Melba and the New Zealand pilot and heroine Jean Batten.

These disparate elements are presented as a unity encircling Phillip, surrounded by the Light Horse in the shape of Australia, and dimmed to form the Union Jack’s field. But they are undeniably heterogeneous, referring to dozens of well known figures in politics, history, religion, and popular entertainment. They are archetypes, pointing to standard narratives or situations, familiar because they repeat and refine innumerable previous writings and performances. The figure of Jean Batten, for example, calls forth a tradition of female heroism of the air; it has to do with technology, empire and gender relations. The A.I.F. employs the Anzac legend, conveying not only scenes of battle but also influential ideas about the relations between Anzacs and other

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1 Ibid., p. 16.
Australians. 'A glimpse of the soldier is seen in his return to pastoral, agricultural, and industrial pursuits.' The Music float, an 'idealistic Conservatorium', with columns, greenery, a golden dome, contributed to this finale '9 girls, each with a Lyre' and a certain well-known Hollywood classicism, the kind found in films like Eddie Cantor's Roman Scandals. Other floats simply provided references to other spectacles: the Pasadena float, for example, came from a famous Californian pageant. The meanings of still others are opaque because they were so transparent to those employed to describe them; according to the Souvenir Programme the Wool Industry Float showed 'progress in the wool industry. An interesting float which illustrates its message and meaning'.

In contrast with the film and the re-enactment, then, the Gala Night was what we might notionally call a 'baroque' instance of heroic history, exuberantly embellished and detailed, but as a whole less legible. I use 'baroque' here without any specific historical reference: the point is only to emphasise the differences between what appear to have been austerely structured public histories and more ambiguous, excessive displays. In 1938 it was simpler: the diversity of imagery required to make a street pageant interesting could not be incorporated within a spectacle illustrating the domination of one man's character over history. I have shown how heroic histories based on Phillip used a panoramic perspective on modern Australia: it was always a panorama narrowly construed in the terms of the 'commanding economy'. The Gala Night marks the limits of that official heroic history.

There was another form of baroque spectacle which is worth some consideration. The Public School Children's Festival, held at the Sydney Cricket Ground on 6 and 7 April, described itself as 'no panoramic review of the historical incidents of the century and a half, but a children's jubilation depicting in happy, joyous, dancing strains the spirit of our land and our national background.' Yet for a 'children's jubilation' the festival was a very ordered affair. Twelve thousand boys and girls from infant, primary, post-primary and domestic science schools created a series of tableaux: 'Homeland', 'Southern Cross', 'Aborigines', 'Garden of Native Flowers', 'Birds and Animals', 'Grand Military Review', 'Wool', 'Wheat', 'Federation', 'Call of 1914', 'British Commonwealth of Nations', 'Nations of the World', and the 'Wheel of Progress'. These were set out in the event's programme, each image 'captioned' as it were by lines of salient poetry. Phillip appeared only in the Military Review. Eight hundred and forty five boys from post-

1 Ibid., p. 17.
2 Ibid., p. 16.
primary schools staged a review of ‘the First Twenty-Five Years of Settlement’, playing ‘Phillip with his Sailors and Marines and Macquarie and his 73rd. Regiment’. The programme quoted S. Elliot Napier:

Phillip, the grave and generous gentleman,  
Great-hearted captain . . . .  
He set the flag: and there a city grew,  
And there from wilted seed, perchance, but true,  
To its great type, our nationhood begins.¹

The Children’s Festival was much closer to the ‘spectacle-displays’ of A Nation is Built than to the pageantry of the Gala Night. As the film March to Nationhood said, it was ‘living symbolism’, coordinating colours, costumes and the childrens’ actions to produce huge, apparently organic patterns and images. In the first half of the programme some of these patterns and images were supposed to suggest a state of affairs transcendently anticipated. The Southern Cross display featured the allegorical female figure of the ‘Spirit of Australia’ accompanied by her ‘Golden Wattle Attendants’. According to the Festival Programme the display illustrated some verse of J. Laurence Rentoul:

She rose amid the Nations, tall and fair,  
The wide South seas kissed at her garment hem,  
Lights of new heavens gleamed in her lustrous hair,  
Freedom her diadem!  
And, on her bosom, Time’s glad prophecy,  
Six stars that into one rich radiance ran.

The Southern Cross sequence began with the entrance into the arena of the Spirit of Australia and her attendants. She then waved her ‘magic wand’ and brought forth ‘A LIVING SOUTHERN CROSS composed of 1,400 Primary School Girls’.² This was followed by the ‘Aborigines’ sequence, in which 900 boys performed ‘Snake’, ‘Hunting’ and ‘War’ in a ‘full corroboree’. At the same time these ‘Aborigines’ also provided a ‘shadowy tableau of the Kangaroo and Emu prophetic of the Australian Coat of Arms’.³ There followed girls as native flora and boys as native fauna, leading into Phillip and the Military Review.

The second half of the Festival accounted for the rest of Australian history. Wool and wheat showed ‘our progress during the next hundred

¹ Public School Children’s Festival, [Sydney 1938], p. [28].  
² Ibid., p. [12].  
³ Ibid., p. [14].
years’. 2,016 ‘primary girls representing wool mysteriously dye and joyfully weave a glorious piece of rainbow cloth’. Even here the image is of the present foreshadowed in the past. Before becoming a cloth the 2,016 girls form a huge ‘150’ as a ‘birthday greeting’. In the ‘Wheat’ tableau 2,000 domestic science school girls danced ‘the life story of wheat, depicting planting, growth, magical ripening, recovery after storm, rippling in the wind, reaping and stooking.’

March to Nationhood: children as wheat

‘Wheat’ was followed by a displays of emerging statehood and nationhood. The Spirit of Australia received delegates from each State in ‘Federation’, but only with ‘The Call of 1914’, did Britannia ‘welcome Australia into the BRITISH COMMONWEALTH OF NATIONS’. Finally all the 12,000 girls and boys ‘form the grand spectacle of a WHEEL OF PROGRESS a symbol of unity through understanding and co-operation.’¹ The Festival ended with singing: ‘Advance Australia Fair’, ‘Celebration Ode’, ‘Song of Sydney’, and ‘God Save the King’.

The ‘Song of Sydney’ gave Phillip the credit for finding an ‘earthly paradise’. This paradise became, according to the song,

¹ Ibid., p. [36].
Gem of the Empire’s crown,
Queen City of the Southern Cross,
SYDNEY TOWN.

But like the rest of the Festival it also placed a considerable emphasis on the anticipation of this greatness.

Another page was written
In British history
When wondrous Sydney came to birth
The town that was to be.¹

That ‘wonder’ inspired by the town of the future, which thus existed in the past, is a significant device here as throughout the Childrens’ Festival. The Festival embellishes those supernatural elements in the re-enactment of Phillip’s landing and the flashbacks and flashforwards of A Nation is Built. In those spectacles, Phillip and others transcended time and history; in the Children’s Festival, almost everything happens magically. There is a strong element of pantomime: Australia is an ‘enchanted’ spirit, who creates a living southern cross with a wave of her wand; an aboriginal corroboree traces a shadowy Australian coat of arms; wool is ‘mysteriously’ dyed.

Unlike A Nation is Built, the Festival does not vest all this magic in one historical man or group of men. Although its central figures anticipate and transform, they do not actually determine the future by foretelling it. They make room for recent Australian history, depicted as the achievement of statehood with federation and nationhood with war. But there is still the sense of a foreshadowed world familiar from the more formal spectacles of heroic history. The Festival does appear to celebrate notions of modernity similar to that employed by the official film. Those masses of children in the Sydney Cricket Ground ostensibly share an over-determined passivity with the multitudes of people and commodities in the film and the Anniversary Day re-enactment. What is the difference between that children’s tableau of the growth and harvesting of wheat and Hurley’s final scene, where the rippling heads of wheat become the heads of children, marching into the future? There is also a contrast in some of the Festival’s tableaux between the mysterious, transformative power of magic and the step by step exposition of manufacturing process, familiar from the dreariest sections of A Nation is Built. The wheat may ripen ‘magically’, but we must still follow it through planting, growth, bad weather, reaping and stooking. What is the difference between this pedagogy and the

¹ Ibid., p. [40].
subjection of the viewer in *A Nation is Built* to the closest detail of the workings of the commanding economy?

In 1927 the German critic Siegfried Kracauer discussed displays of this kind. His article 'The Mass Ornament' begins with the observation of ‘a change of taste’ in ‘physical culture’. The ‘Tiller girls’, ‘products of the American “distraction factories”’ are responsible. They produce spectacular gymnastic pageants, becoming ‘no longer individual girls, but indissoluble female units whose movements are mathematical demonstrations’. These globally popular spectacles are ‘mass ornaments’, consisting of ‘thousands of bodies, sexless bodies in bathing suits. The regularity of their patterns is acclaimed by the masses, who themselves are arranged in row upon ordered row.’ The patterns are not organic, but rational, geometric forms. ‘Their mass gymnastics are never performed by whole, autonomous bodies whose contortions would defy rational understanding. Arms, thighs and other segments are the smallest components of the composition.’

The mass ornament forsakes ‘personality and national community’ for calculability, and in this particular rationality the ornament reflects the structure of capitalism. Capitalism is ‘indifferent to variations of form’; it seeks ‘the fabrication of masses of workers who can be employed and used uniformly throughout the world’. According to Kracauer ‘the hands in the factory correspond to the legs of the Tiller Girls’: the mass ornament is thus ‘the aesthetic reflex of the rationality aspired to by the prevailing economic system’. But the ornament is also a regression from reason into the mythology of nature; it is the work of a stunted reason, ‘too weak to find human beings in the masses or to render the figures of the ornament translucent to knowledge’. The result was an impediment to reason, a ‘godless mythological cult’. Such an ornament can only distract the masses from ‘the necessity to change the current order’. The mass ornament has ‘a social meaning much like that of the Roman circus games sponsored by tyrants’.

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2 Ibid., p. 74.

3 Ibid., p. 75.
March to Nationhood: the Children's Festival as 'mass ornament'

A Kracauerian analysis might well find an associated reduction of humanity in the precise displays of *A Nation is Built* and the Children's Festival. But the Festival might not be an instance of a Hegelian dialectic of reason and nature: it could be seen as a baroque combination of cultural conventions of performance and pedagogy, the metaphysics of pantomime and the detail of a social studies lesson. In this case the spectacle would be conscious artifice rather than a mythological regression to nature. It would not be a reflex of capitalism, and the children composing the mass ornament would not be so seriously dehumanised.

There is a considerable difference between the presence of the children marching out of the wheat at the end *A Nation is Built* and the children's performances in the Festival. In the film the children, like the other masses of people and things, simply appear: there is no explanation for their presence other than the fact that they have been foreseen by visionary heroes. But in the Festival, their participation is credited. The official programme listed the schools involved in each display, suggesting that it was partly designed for parents particularly wanting to see their children, and the children of their school, among the others. Moreover the programme also specified for each display those who organised it, choreographed it, designed it and made the costumes for it. Space was also given over to general credits; even the photographs of the Minister and the Director-General appeared on the first and second pages. Clearly part of the appeal of the Festival was as a
contrived event. It follows that we cannot attribute a 'social function' to it as readily Kracauer does to his 'mass ornament'. The Festival did devote itself to the 1938 imagery of a transcendent destiny and an export economy, and that imagery did have a certain political context. But it does not follow that that politics will always predicate an illustration of the life cycle of a field of wheat.

**Iconography and the Heroic Countenance**

An argument about visionary history must be similarly circumspect in attributing a general politics to a particular mode of historical representation. Frank Hurley's persistent and occasionally lyrical film was the most detailed illustration of the visionary hero's incorporation and subjection of his audience. The same project is manifest in the numerous posters, leaflets and newspaper illustrations which promoted and commented on the celebrations. Despite the picture from *Punch* which *The Argus* reproduced, Phillip was very rarely presented as an insubstantial ghost.\(^1\) He was usually depicted as a solid figure in uniform, often several times larger than everybody else, and was often shown in juxtaposition with some sign of modernity. The *Sydney Morning Herald* 's supplement cover, pictured on this chapter's first page, is typical.

In the photograph reproduced below John Dunningham and Edward Tye, an officer in the celebrations administration, are discussing a publicity poster which provides another good example. Here Phillip has his back to the viewer: the poster is a depiction of what Phillip is seeing, and an invitation to adopt Phillip's perspective. There is a crowd of first settlers—not convicts but well-turned out officers, gentlemen and ladies—and behind them the Sydney Harbour Bridge, a metonym for modern Australia.

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\(^1\) Another exception is the Australian National Travel Association advertisement in the London *Tatler*, 29 September 1937, reproduced in *Australians 1938, op. cit.*, p. 12.
The cover of the *Newcastle Programme* carried the same image, but gave it a local reference by substituting the Newcastle skyline for the Bridge. A simpler device was used on the cover of the programme for Sydney’s 26 January pageants: a thick line drawing of Phillip, head and shoulders, with glassy eyes staring grimly at the reader.
These images are not straightforward celebrations of the European transformation of Australia, but illustrations of the fulfilment of Phillip's vision of the future. But as we have seen in *A Nation is Built*, Phillip was not the only vehicle for this particular articulation of past and present. A 'symbolic float' showing explorers in the March to Nationhood pageant represented, according to the pageant programme, 'the explorers gazing ideologically into the Australian horizon. They see vast fertile fields, a land flowing with milk and honey, and great
cities of the future—a mirage that materialised. ... Leichhardt Municipal Council is the enterprising donor.1

It would however be an overstatement to say that Phillip was generally represented in juxtaposition with modern Australia. The basis of the *Sydney Morning Herald* image was an eighteenth century portrait by Francis Wheatley, held in the National Portrait Gallery in London and dated 1786. This picture and Wheatley’s head and shoulders miniature in the Mitchell Library were often used unaltered. There was also an oval half length print after Wheatley by W. Sherwin, dated 1796. These pictures were apparently regarded as sources of information about Phillip’s character. Not surprisingly, they provided room for interpretive manoeuvre. M. Barnard Eldershaw wrote that in them Phillip’s face appeared ‘delicate, nervous, and sensitive’. They were drawn into speculation about some ‘deep, secret unhappiness’ in his life.2

George Mackaness wrote that ‘a proper understanding’ of a person’s character depended in part on a knowledge of their appearance; it was necessary to know, for example, ‘whether the subject: “be a black or fair man...”’ (he was quoting Richard Steele). As far as Mackaness could deduce, Phillip seemed to fall somewhere in between ‘black or fair’. He saw in the paintings ‘a slightish man, dark-eyed, complexion dark, even olive-skinned, with a somewhat aquiline nose’. Without commenting on the relevance of these things to the issue of Phillip’s character, he took them as evidence of Phillip’s father, ‘who is said to be a denized German Jew from Frankfurt’. He mentioned other ‘outstanding physiognomical features’: ‘the high cheek bones, the full chin, the mouth small and tense, with marked decision of character’.3

Mackaness and Barnard Eldershaw were addressing an old problem in heroic history: the question of the hero’s character, his or her essential virtue. They shared the old belief—a ruling assumption of portraiture and portrait galleries—that iconic representations of people could convey information about their moral natures. This was not because of the conventional association of virtues and moral flaws with certain bodily features, but because physiognomy, the countenance, was regarded as an actual expression of character. Visual images of heroes were therefore valuable sources for heroic history; moreover their reproduction had to communicate the heroic character correctly. In the United States, iconic representations of Washington were judged by this

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1 Pageants ... *op.cit.*, p. 26.
2 *Phillip of Australia*, *op.cit.*, pp. 344-5.
principle; in the immediate antebellum there was considerable debate on the subject.\(^1\)

Nineteenth century Americans were much surer about the character of their national hero than twentieth century Australians. Pictures of Phillip signified different things to different historians. One successor to the heroic historiography of Barnard Eldershaw and Mackaness was Manning Clark, who read into the images of Phillip qualities of 'courage, duty, discipline and self-control', 'the Roman or stoical virtues'. Clark also saw likeable signs which Barnard Eldershaw had not seen, but shared their sense of an intimation of unknown suffering. He observed also that 'if one may judge from the portraits, he was somewhat careless if not indifferent to questions of personal appearance.'\(^2\) The picture he reproduced, however, Wheatley's miniature, gives no indication of this—is Clark referring to Wheatley's full portrait, which shows a large bulge in Phillip's trousers where his penis would be?

Wheatley's picture underwent an interesting transformation in 1938. It reappeared on the cover of a pamphlet distributed to school children, *An Historic Retrospect on the Occasion of the 150th Anniversary Celebrations of the Founding of Australia*.\(^3\) There were several changes. Some of the background—the sailor in the boat on the right—was chopped, to make room for an enlarged Phillip, who was then ornately framed. And the bulge in his trousers disappeared. Phillip became a solitary and respectable hero.

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3 [Sydney 1938].
Visionary History

VICE-ADMIRAL ARTHUR PHILLIP
From the portrait by Francis Wheatley, R.A. in the National Portrait Gallery, London.

Frontispiece, Phillip of Australia
AN HISTORIC RETROSPECT
on the occasion of the
150TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS
OF THE FOUNDING OF AUSTRALIA
The Hero and the State

M. Barnard Eldershaw did not edit Wheatley’s picture when they used it on the frontispiece of *Phillip of Australia*. ‘Every man is a mystery and remains a mystery. This can be only the most hazardous kind of guesswork’, they wrote. In Phillip’s picture they saw indications not only of his character but also of the significance of his life. Following their train of argument, we can find an alternative heroic history.

If his face revealed a delicacy and sensitivity, it was not fearless. Why not? Barnard Eldershaw did not doubt Phillip’s courage. His bravery must have been so ‘matter-of-fact’ that everyone took it for granted; perhaps he had acquired his indifference to danger through some pain or disappointment. But just as his bravery went unnoticed, so did his generosity and self-restraint, his egalitarianism, his general competence and rectitude. Because Phillip was so reasonable, so much an eighteenth century man in the value he placed on reason, his actions always seemed reasonable rather than generous. ‘Duty and reason were his prison.’ He was respected for his actions but not admired. He had the capacity to organise people but not to be popular. For Barnard Eldershaw, Phillip was a casualty of an eighteenth century opposition between reason and emotion.

His life was tragic because of the quality of his reason. He was the architect as well as the inaugurator of the colonial state; his state was not created by chance but because he had in his mind a concept of a state. He carried that idea with him ‘in the same way as an artist carries the germ of his creative work.’ Although his government was ‘essentially paternal, the State Phillip worked towards was civil, democratic, and based on law. This germ in Phillip’s mind was to be the cell [sic] from which a nation grew’. Although Phillip found the rudiments of a civil apparatus in his commission and instructions, these instruments also gave him total authority, so he always had a choice between ‘the difficult, slow cumbrous way of civil administration, or the quick, easy, and arbitrary way of a military

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despotism.' A military oligarchy established itself when Phillip left New South Wales, but not before.

Phillip's state was democratic. He made convicts, marines and sailors equal before the law. He gave ex-convicts the prospect of becoming landowners. Barnard Eldershaw approved the equal rationing Shann condemned as 'economic childishness'. They refused to interpret this as Shann did, as a famine measure. Even so, they did argue that Phillip's sense of equity was 'the moral force that got the colony through famine after famine without moral desintegration.' Phillip ensured that officers were not allowed privileges, that all fish and game caught were distributed publicly, and that his own supplies of flour went into the public store.

Above all, Phillip's state was free. Before he left England he recognised that military rule would be initially necessary, but wrote:

> the laws of this country will, of course, be introduced in New South Wales, and there is one that I would wish to take place from the moment his Majesty's forces take possession of the country—that there can be no slavery in a free land and consequently no slaves.

'Here, like a spring at last breaking through, is his essential faith' wrote Barnard Eldershaw. Although New South Wales did become a military state when Phillip left, the 'self-respect and trust in a just and impartial government' he gave the colony did not disappear. Eventually his work was carried on by Macquarie. Phillip's tragedy lay in his total reliance on reason to achieve his ends, but in the end he did escape from his 'prison of reason': 'He was the first man to believe in the future of Australia as a white nation while it was still unreasonable to believe.'

By 1938 Phillip's concept of the state was part of Australian culture. Civil and democratic traditions were strong, so the argument went, and there was 'a deep-rooted tendency, despite a cynical distrust of politicians, to look on Government—the State—as the natural prime mover, the source of reform and progress, the common shield of all.'

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3 Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 33.
4 *Ibid*.
So for Barnard Eldershaw Phillip was also a visionary—an autocrat who imagined democracy, a naval officer committed to civil administration. It is easy to read into this celebration of a progressive state the preoccupations of Flora Eldershaw, Marjorie Barnard and the other members of that group of women writers Drusilla Modjeska discusses in *Exiles at Home*. Modjeska shows that as the thirties progressed the feminist concerns of writers like Barnard Eldershaw, Eleanor Dark and Dymphna Cusack were ‘undercut’ by economic and political crisis. By the late thirties ‘the threat of fascism ... was the over-riding issue’.

Clearly enough, *Phillip of Australia* argues that benevolent, democratic state power has a historical basis in Australia. As pro-democratic heroic history, it allows ordinary people a greater degree of agency than the imperial kind. Although it gives Phillip sole credit for his vision of democracy, it acknowledges that the actual construction of the colony could be achieved only through everyone’s labour. Although it claims that Phillip alone ‘fused’ the new settlement into a community, it recognises that he had to do this with ‘raw material’—the people themselves, convicts, sailors and soldiers. It defends the convicts in the usual humanist way, insisting that they ‘were debased by their punishment rather than by their original offence’. The convicts were a problem for Phillip because they were apathetic—the result of despair—rather than villainous. More fundamentally, Barnard Eldershaw suggests that it was precisely Phillip’s inability to involve people in his plan for a state that constituted his tragedy. The human factor was missing. ‘He had no gift with people....’

Barnard Eldershaw’s Phillip was also a nationalist to a degree the imperial version could never be. He was a nationalist for an exclusive settler-state: he believed in the ‘future of Australia as a white nation’. To commemorate Phillip was to commemorate this Australia.

As we look back a hundred and fifty years the first five years of Australia—Phillip’s Governorship—hang like a bright medallion against the anonymous centuries that lie behind them. It is not so long ago, yet it is all time as far as white Australia is concerned. ... [The settlement] was fused together into a community, a new entity, by one man—Phillip. He not only fashioned it, he created it.

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1 Sydney 1981.
Attributing Phillip’s heroism specifically to his ‘Australian’ state building may not have much down-played his status as an ‘empire builder’, but it did affirm a national priority, and it acknowledged the diverging interests of the settler-state and its metropolis. In Phillip of Australia, the national vision is ill-supported by English authorities. Phillip makes his plans ‘in the teeth of official policy’.¹ The new settlement suffers endless problems because of the mistakes of the imperial power. Phillip sends increasingly frustrated letters explaining the settlement’s ‘struggle for existence’, listing basic needs, protesting about the poor quality of supplies, and requesting more skilled convicts.² The basic story of hardship at the hands of the distant and powerful is a familiar one in Australia’s national historiography, but it is a story which needs to be taken seriously, especially in the context of the thirties, when Australia’s dependence on England was so painfully exposed.

Although Karl Cramp’s version of Phillip was the dominant model in 1938, Barnard Eldershaw’s alternative hero was commemorated here and there. The Daily Telegraph’s 26 January editorial celebrated Phillip’s rôle in ‘The Making of a Democracy’. It said that in late eighteenth century England poverty and slavery were ‘accepted as necessary conditions of society’ by ‘all but a few fantastic visionaries’. ‘Laws were harsh, pleasures brutal, rulers cynical.’ The rulers who planned the penal settlement had no ‘brave Imperial vision’. They wanted to get rid of convicts. But Phillip was wiser:

He foresaw the inevitable rise of that system of society in which the function of government is shared by all, in which there is no privilege, no dictatorship, no abuse of justice for personal ends.³

Conclusion

It was always an easy teleological gesture for Phillip’s supporters to interpret his state as the origin of the modern Australian one. It was harder to argue that Phillip’s state was a vital force in colonial development, however well-suited it had been to his immediate requirements. Phillip of Australia is the most elaborate defence of Phillip as state builder, although it makes no attempt to reconstruct the operation of the colonial state after his return to England. Fitzpatrick’s

¹ Ibid., p. 29.
² See, for example, Ibid., pp. 134-137.
³ p. 8.
analysis of early New South Wales traced the developing contradiction between the tasks of establishing an agricultural community and maintaining a prison. It was not visionary history at all. The histories of M. Barnard Eldershaw on the one hand, and Cramp and Hurley on the other, were in opposition; but on examination the competing Phillips seem unhappy alternatives, to borrow Denise Riley’s phrase. "Phillip of Australia" presented an unpopular, unhappy settler democrat as a contemporary hero; "A Nation is Built" produced a visionary empire builder who offered the Australians of his encompassing perception the kind of relationship which objects had with Midas.

Yet it is also possible to see how Phillip did work as an adaptable and positive hero for white Australia in the thirties, with uses that extended well beyond Hurley’s romantic reconciliation of history, or the children’s pantomime of magical transformation. A definite politics cannot be attached to this visionary history. The different versions of Phillip’s vision offered divergent resources of hope: as a governor-figure, he reasserted the possibility of a close and prosperous imperial relationship; as the founder and source of the Australian polity, his commitment to liberty could encourage optimism about the prospects for democracy.
Pioneering History

AUSTRALIA'S 150TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS.
SECONDARY SCHOOLS' PAGEANT
SYDNEY TOWN HALL 29-31 MARCH 1938

The Hon. D.H. Drummond M.L.A
Minister for Education

The Hon. J.M. Dunningham M.L.A.
Minister in Charge of Celebrations

G.R. Thomas Esq., C.M.G., B.A.
Director of Education

Price 6d

Miscellaneous Publications Collection, Mitchell Library
You harvest where you fathers went to sow,
You gather where they planted long ago;
Where now your shining, swift wheeled chariots run,
They urged their labouring teams from sun to sun:
Your cities proudly pointing to the sky,
They founded surely in the long-gone-by.

William Tainsh, ‘A Pioneer Speaks’¹

Our flocks and our herds will increase, and our colony will become a nation!

_Heritage_, 1935

The real history of this country is written in the lives of the explorers and the pioneering men and women who, facing innumerable hardships and carrying their lives in their hands, pushed ever farther and farther out into the unknown interior and applied their brains and hands to the settlement and development of the new land. They had faith and dauntless courage, and they faced a thousand perils. Upon their work we have built.

Editorial, ‘The Historic Sense’, _Sydney Morning Herald_, 1938²

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¹ _Argus Week-end Magazine_, 29 January 1938, p. 4.
² 26 February 1938, p. 10.
By half past nine on the morning of 26 January, 1938, the re-enactment of Phillip's landing was over, and a huge pageant, 'Australia's March to Nationhood', was making its way down Macquarie Street. The re-created Phillip presided over 'one the most picturesque floats in the pageant', as the official programme put it. Not far behind him was a 'super float', preceded by its own 'announcement float': 'Foundation Layers'. The programme explained: 'Represents Australia in its primitive state. The group of Foundation Layers are the men and women pioneers starting to clear the land and build their Australian homes.'

Macquarie Street, 'one of Sydney's few principal passages of honour' according to the urban historian Max Kelly, was the obvious place to begin such a spectacle while itself expressing a different kind of history. According to popular and populist tradition, the pioneers were the 'builders' of the nation. On the other hand Macquarie Street framed the pageantry with important buildings of state and led the floats past imperial icons of royal and heroic history: Victoria and Albert, Bourke and Cook. This chapter is an examination of the idea of the 'Foundation Layers', the pioneers. It follows the Macquarie Street dialogue between national and imperial, popular and official histories.

In chapter three I discussed the problematic populism of the visionary history that was erected around Governor Phillip: how Phillip was purposefully dislodged from the community of the first white settlement to avoid the taint of criminal association, given the rôle of the prophetic architect of white Australia and credited with a supernatural, transformative foresight. The spectacles re-enacting his landing were magical re-orderings of history but they did not carry their populism through. They did not attach historical agency to ordinary white Australians and they were ambivalent towards Phillip's exercise of state power. Even a non-mystical, democratic visionary history, quite opposed to the official version, remarked on Phillip's autocracy and isolation.

Heroes could imagine the future and their audiences could be invited to bear witness to their visions. But however attractively this kind of visionary history might be dramatised, it necessarily left out the doing of history—it was history without the past. In 1938 there were other

spectacles and other histories which were about the transformation of Australia by white settlers, as distinct from the visionary anticipation of this transformation. In these representations notions of pioneering were crucial. The idea of pioneering combined a modern idea of a people making their own history with an ancient idea of the superiority of the country, where this history-making took place, over the city, where it did not. In 1938 pioneering history was the most widely available alternative to visionary history. In some contexts discussed below it was explicitly opposed to visionary history.

My use of the word 'pioneering' needs to be clarified. The subject of this chapter is not what was supposed to be pioneering activity, but a set of ideas about pioneering and its historical significance in the thirties. 'Pioneering' is treated as a working historical concept, a notion of the past and its relationship with the present and, recursively, a concept which must itself be located in history, in specific cultural practices, institutions and politics. This concept is not the same as the 'bush legend' or the 'Australian legend'. There is in Australian historiography a long tradition of analysis of the bush as a major influence on culture, society and politics. Russel Ward's *The Australian Legend* (1958) has been discussed for over thirty years; before him Fred Alexander in *Moving Frontiers* (1947) and R.M.Crawford in *Australia* (1952) addressed the subject; before them, ideas about the importance of the bush were commonplace in nationalist writing.

The long debate will not be rehearsed here. The tradition of writing about the bush legend has been about the nature of what is taken to be a national culture, whereas what interests me is pioneering as a kind of history. Although the historical significance of pioneering is certainly one of the standard claims argued about the bush legend, it is only one element of that legend as historians have understood it. Nor has it been argued in much detail. The question at issue has most often been the degree of influence exercised by a historically delineated bush culture over a much more general national cultural identity.¹ There has been surprisingly little written specifically about pioneering as a kind of Australian history: the work that has been done is discussed below.

Conspicuous contrasts can be drawn between pioneering and visionary histories. Unlike visionary history, which elevated individual subjects, pioneering histories in general described collective effort. Whereas visionary history was about speech—the expression of foresight—

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pioneering history was about deeds. Other, more important differences make up the main issues of this chapter: while visionary history registered the powers of singular men, pioneering history asserted the supplementary agency of women; and in contrast with the imperial content of visionary history, pioneering history claimed to identify an Australian national history. These points of contrast are worth sketching in, with the proviso that they do not provide a fine-grained specification of pioneering history. Qualifications need to be entered, precisely because there was no one history, no unitary ideology. But the themes introduced with a wide range of materials below—especially the arguments to do with women's and national histories—are taken up in more detailed analyses later in the chapter.

Collective History

M. Barnard Eldershaw wrote that pioneering was 'not the adventure of individuals, but the life story of a great and increasing company, a folk movement'. H.E. Horne's *Ode for Australia's 150th Anniversary* provides a good instance of the pioneer legend as collective history. Interestingly, the song invokes history as a popular spectacle. Like many other celebratory verses it sought to sum up Australian history, but in doing so it made history an event in itself:

One hundred years and fifty speak today;
Wave, starry banners, 'neath earth's loveliest sky,
For splendid deeds, and dreams that cannot die!

The emphasis is on plurality. The spectacle is not focussed on a single historical figure, nor is the history derived from a single source. Rather than making Phillip a transcendent figure, Horne praises him as 'first of all our pioneers'. The story of Australia's birthday was their story:

One hundred years and fifty
Their wondrous story tell
Of dauntless faith and courage
That served Australia well:——
A tale of settlers fighting
With flood, and fire, and drought,
And great explorers lighting
The camp fires further out;
With voice of jubilation
From sea to sea they praise
The builders of a nation
Through long heroic days.

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The pioneers were anonymous, and ‘great and lowly’.1

Against Horne, the economic historian Edward Shann can again be cited. Shann rejected the ‘story of their westward march’ as it was received from Paterson and others. In his account pioneering history was no ‘epic of disinterested bravery’. The pioneers had not waged a ‘public war’. Rather they were economic heroes, changing history in the pursuit of self-interest. ‘What drew them to Australia was not quest of glory, but the main chance of making good a family’s foothold in a new and, as they held, unused land.’ The result was ‘the occupation of land by a new economy’, a transformation of the greatest historical significance. Individuals, “undirected by the fostering care of government”, developed the pastoral industry which still remains the principal activity and support of the white man’s Australian economy.2

The ‘lowness’ of pioneers was also widely contested. Robert Jeffery’s 1938 compendium Pioneers of Australia provided a ‘Biographical Review of Australia’s Landed Gentry’. Here the pioneers were ‘fine old British stock’. They were, according to Jeffery, ‘men and women brought up in affluence and comfort, they heard the call of adventure, and migrated to an unknown country’.3

A History of Deeds

Pioneers were rarely represented as people of words. They were people of deeds. Pioneering meant actions: as in A Nation is Built, it meant extending the frontiers of civilisation, by occupying and living off the land. Barnard Eldershaw placed a stronger emphasis on the actual transformation of the continent, which they saw as both productive and destructive. In Australia W.K.Hancock described ‘adventurous pioneers’: ‘...what they have aimed at is the effective occupation of their continent at the quickest possible speed. They will not rest until they have staked their indisputable claim.’4 Pioneers could be visionaries, but they entered history through their actions. Mary Gilmore’s ‘Ode to the Pioneer Women’ attests to this:

The handless [sic] dreamer wasteful sits among his dreams
While worlds about him fall. These, too, had dreams.
But theirs were dreams of homes, of hope and pride:
And these were braced with deeds!

1 See H.E.Horne, Ode for Australia’s 150th Anniversary, [Sydney 1938], pp. 1-4.
3 R.Jeffery, Pioneers of Australia, Melbourne 1938, Preface.
For they were women who at need took up
And plied the axe, or bent above the clodded spade;
Who herded sheep; who rode the hills, and brought
The half-wild cattle home—helpmates of men ...

Women’s History

‘For they were women...’. Pioneering history offered a history of women and beyond that insisted on the centrality of women’s history in the history of the nation. Who, or what, was the pioneer woman? ‘Mother of the past and of the future, a figure immortal and as beautiful as Ruth, she stands with her baby in her arms, Madonna of the wilderness, the pioneer woman of outback’, wrote Ernestine Hill.¹ The freelance writer Zora Cross argued the history in the Sydney Morning Herald Women’s Supplement:

In the midst of the first settlement on the shores of Port Jackson a British flag was planted, and that flag has been carried on not so much by daring men as by a little, hard, lean woman, bronzed with the sun—a woman with work-worn hands and bright horizon-blue eyes, with the imperishable light of hope in them. Unknown, unnamed, and fearless, she still carries on—the woman pioneer'.²

This history of the unnamed did have individual heroes. ‘The greatest of all our pioneer women’ was Caroline Chisholm, who accordingly occupied a pivotal position in Australian history. ‘It is true that Governor Phillip founded Australia, but Caroline Chisholm began the true colonisation; and from this time a second period of pioneering began, for the backbone of a primary producing country such as ours is the small farmer; and these pioneers, by the grace and Caroline Chisholm, were largely British.’³ In an editorial published on 29 January 1938 the Australian Women’s Weekly agreed that pioneer women were the nation’s true colonisers.

First, every Australian must salute with pride and gratitude the pioneer women, past and present.

Without their majestic courage, their patient endurance of hardship, loneliness and incessant toil, and

³ Ibid.
their divine inspiration, Australia would still be a savage land—peopled with white savages instead of black.

With axe and bullwhip and plough, the men thrust forward their salients into the grim terrain of the bush, and set up their rude outposts.

It was the women who turned those outposts into homes, the rough camps into townships, the straggling selections into civilised farming communities.¹

The Weekly's and Cross's assertion of the centrality of the woman pioneer must be qualified. It was not uncommon to assert the national importance of women's history, but this was generally done by first locating women's history within family history. National history was then constituted by family history, by 'home-making'. Chisholm's significance according to Cross is that she responded to the social isolation of the frontier. 'Then it was that from east and west, north and south, in the aching loneliness of a heart almost breaking, Australia sent up a real cry for women and children.' Chisholm 'heard that poignant cry for ordinary family life, without which no nation can progress'.² In Frances Fraser's foreword to the Centenary Gift Book (an official publication of the 1934 Victorian centenary) there is this:

We honour especially those [women] who made the great venture, and came with their men-folk to this unknown land, enduring the greatest privations with a spirit that inspired husbands and sons to persevere in spite of all. Women did more than cook and sweep. They milked cows, dug for gold, sowed the corn, and even literally put their hand to the plough. They tended the sick and dying, they comforted the homesick, and in every way passed down to the women of to-day their splendid heritage of courage and initiative.³

In McCubbin's famous triptych The Pioneer Fraser saw the true iconography of the nation's history: the young man and woman in the forest, looking hopefully; the home, the orchard, the farm and the child; and the child transformed into a man, at his parents' grave, with the city just through the trees. The painting's story in this account is about work, the transformation of the bush and the growth of the nation. Above all, it is about the family, the son's inheritance from his parents.

¹ 'An Editorial', 29 January 1938, p. 12. Italics in the original.
² Ibid.
³ F. Fraser and N. Palmer (eds), Centenary Gift Book, Melbourne 1934, p. [7].
These were also the subjects of standard pioneering histories between the wars, where we find pioneering families endlessly exhibited, analysed and documented. P.C. Mowle compiled *A Genealogical History of Pioneering Families of Australia*, recording the descendants of the ‘earliest arrivals in Australia’ and devoting a little space to the lives of these ‘arrivals’ themselves. Mowle thought his book would ‘serve to show the close bonds of kinship which exist between the families in Australia and those of the Mother Country’. The families of convicts were not included.

In many narrative accounts of pioneering history, the strong bush woman is a familiar figure, inspiring the men and taking their place at the plough as in Fraser’s account. The bush woman is often preoccupied with masculinity or its absence, helping her weak male siblings and supporting her strong father before finally marrying someone who will secure the family’s future. The film historian William D. Routt has estimated that more than half of Australian feature films made between 1919 and 1939 stress family relationships, and of these more than three quarters emphasize father-daughter relationships in particular. (Of course these films were not all bush films.) In *The Squatter’s Daughter* Joan is the bush woman, praying for herself and her crippled brother Jimmy, while her father is in England:

‘O Lord, have us in Thy keeping. Teach us to stand up straight in our trials, to face our punishments, and to be not cast down in our sorrows. Teach Jimmy to live bravely, and to die bravely when his time comes. And give him, O Lord, the manliness he is longing for.’

What is at stake in this kind of narrative is not masculinity for its own sake, but masculinity for the sake of something more important, the pioneering family and its future. The difficult business of inheritance is often the central issue. It may be that the pioneering family is patriarchal, as it is in *The Squatter’s Daughter*, where the unfolding of the main characters’ relations to the squatter-father provides the film with its story. John Tulloch’s account of bush films notes the patriarchal form of the woman’s inheritance from her father in films like this one,

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where she does inherit the family property, but must entrust it to a good husband.¹ There are also examples of pioneering families which are not patriarchal. Some of these appear below.

National History

Pioneers ‘made the nation’. Displaying Australia, a large format 'Pictorial Survey of the Progress of a Young Nation', was dedicated to

   the Pioneer Men and Women of Australia whose labour and sacrifice have laid the foundation of a Great White Nation. On their memories the sun shall never set, nor in the hearts of the Australian people shall they be forgotten. We shall continue to remember that they died from hunger and thirst and exhaustion that future generations of Australians should enjoy the heritage of our race, while the fruits of their seeking materialise in the creation of a National soul.²

Displaying Australia was published in 1945, with a preface by John Curtin. It should not be read simply as an expression of the unusually independent national policy of that time. The key words ‘pioneer’, ‘sacrifice’, ‘Great White Nation’, ‘heritage’, ‘race’, and ‘National soul’ are redolent of between-wars culture. These words were among the most rhetorical elements in the lexicon of an enormous body of writing and image-making on Australian national history and identity. From the First World War to the Second, this work on Australia encompassed the disparate contributions of C.E.W.Bean, W.M.Hughes, Ion Idriess, Charles and Elsa Chauvel, Xavier Herbert, the Australian Women’s Weekly and Marjorie Barnard, to name only several participants in an enduring discussion conducted for a huge audience.³ Pioneering was one of several supposedly distinctive national experiences, construed in an orthodox way as the foundation of greatness or—rarely—as ‘the coming of the dingoes’ (Herbert).

It is worth emphasising that in this context pioneering history was almost always regarded as a ‘foundation’—the actual achievement of

¹ Legends on the Screen, op. cit., p. 387. I have found useful William Routt’s comments on Tulloch’s analysis, op. cit., p. 33.
² George G. Tennant and William O. Hay (compilers), Displaying Australia, Sydney 1945, p. 3.
the nation was to be realised some time in the future. The movement of national history was frequently utopian. In a foreword to *The Peaceful Army*, Zara Gowrie quoted Ruskin: 'A Nation is only worthy of the soil and scenes that it has inherited, when, by all its acts and arts, it is making them more lovely for its children.' She wrote: 'If the dreams of our forefathers can be fulfilled, a Golden Age lies before us.' The film *March to Nationhood* encouraged its audience 'On to nationhood, on to modernity, on to the conquest of the air—in which Australians have played no mean part'.

Pioneering history and the culture of the bush were involved in this accumulating mythology driving towards national fulfilment. M.Barnard Eldershaw saw the business of building on the national foundations as a cultural extension of pioneering. They cast the whole project in pioneering terms:

We would never possess [the earth] by conquest; only by the exercise of the imagination slowly drawing together the two incompatibles can we attain that fusion with our environment that makes it our home. Culture is the image in which man and his environment are brought together. It is the mirror held to life, and man, walled into his own brain, cannot see himself except in this mirror. We cannot be a nation until we conceive ourselves as a nation, and we cannot possess anything until we have passed it through our imagination. The growth of our culture is part of our epic, man against the continent. In a struggle so large, 'for' and 'against' become interchangeable terms.¹

From what white point of view was pioneering so clearly a distinctive experience? It could be so only in comparison with life in the centre of empire, or in the colonial cities. The insistence on the exceptional character of Australian pioneering may have been less a sign of independence than a consequence of that metropolis-centredness which C.Hartley Grattan observed among British dominions. In *Introducing Australia* he quoted a Canadian's image of the Commonwealth as a large family whose members wrote home to Mother but rarely to each other.² From other perspectives the white occupation of Australia was not a distinctive experience: in spite of locally specific conditions, it was shared with numerous other settler societies. Canadian pioneering history, for example, has much in common with Australian histories:

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² New York 1942, p. 213.
The hardship which these people, many of them brought up in a considerable degree of comfort, endured while they were hewing trees to find space for their houses and fields, usually miles from the nearest human help or companionship is difficult to imagine. For many years the long struggle went on, and by degrees they raised a new nation in the wilderness. The memory of these loyalists is honoured throughout the Dominion and no descendant of theirs will ever forget that he is the issue of noble and hardy stock.1

An account of pioneering from the point of view of the centre of empire did not always recognise exceptional national histories: pioneering was simply empire building, or even 'the rise of the West'. In his preface to Empire Pioneers, which will serve as an example of the genre, Sir Harry Johnston wrote:

From a survey of the world we realise that the last of the great invasions of Europe by races of mankind coming from Africa and Asia ... ceased with the invasion of eastern Europe by the Turks and the Tartars in the middle of the fifteenth century. And simultaneously, or quite a few years afterwards, the emigration in research and discovery of the Europeans to Asia, Africa, and America began. It is at this time that the outlook of these books commences.2

Empire Pioneers contained chapters on individual great men: David Livingstone, John McDouall Stuart, Richard Burton and others. Thus an imperial history of pioneering was quite different from Australian versions.

However schematic, these counterpoints do mark out the field of pioneering histories. My argument is that this field can be productively considered as a form of 'disposable history', and the pioneer as a special kind of historical agent. Pioneering history says that there is a general, unified Australian history, which has been made at the disposition of white Australians. The question is, in what way? How did pioneers dispose of the past? In one standard article on 'the pioneer legend', J.B.Hirst argues that pioneering history has two principal political

characteristics: it is both a democratic and a conservative history. According to him the legend gave ‘the ordinary man’ ‘heroic status’. It declared that ‘the people had made the nation’. Moreover, it was not merely to do with ‘the ordinary man’, because it ‘always included women’. The legend’s conservatism consisted in a ‘communal pride in what the people have achieved’.1

Hirst’s analysis is concerned with early statements of the legend, poems written by Lawson and Paterson in the 1890s: ‘Song of the Future’, ‘How the Land was Won’ and ‘On Kiley’s Run’. These are elegies to a past age of pioneering, of ‘humane employers and decent class relations’, of land and opportunity. Equally, they are condemnations of their 1890s present, of the power of the bank and the absentee landowner. Thus the pioneer legend in the 1890s was already an ‘invented tradition’, to adopt Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger’s terminology (which was formulated after Hirst’s article was published). The legend can be understood as one result of the nationalist search for history in the 1890s, the work of a transient radical impulse. It was then incorporated into conservative thinking, not least because it contained conservative elements from the beginning. It obscured the political struggles of the mid-nineteenth century, and its insistent celebration of a past golden age was wholly nostalgic.

This is Hirst’s argument about the origins of the legend. It is his argument about its political character which I want to take up here. Hirst does not make clear what he is referring to when he describes the pioneer legend as ‘democratic’—equality of rights before the law, a fair and open electoral system, or popular power. All these senses of ‘democratic’ were current in the nineteenth century. There was an egalitarian refrain in some pioneering history, but ‘democratic’ may imply something more than an interest in ‘the ordinary man’ or woman: a popular affirmation of a shared potency. Is ‘democratic’ nostalgia possible? The idea that the pioneer legend was democratic is not actually the result of any analysis in Hirst’s paper. It is an ascription Hirst takes over from pioneering history’s account of itself, the idea, for example, that McCubbin’s The Pioneer was ‘a poem of democracy’, as the Age called it in 1905.2

To argue the point is not to indulge in exposing what may now be regarded as undemocratic elements in pioneering histories. What is at

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stake is an understanding of how the historical concept worked: the content of that egalitarianism, the identity of the pioneers, and the manner in which they were supposed to exercise their disposition over Australian history. Hirst says that the pioneer legend ‘included women’. Again the issue is: in what way? How were pioneer women regarded as historical agents? It is not enough to say that women were ‘included’. The obscurity of Hirst’s argument here may be the result of his choice of ‘legend’ as the subject of his analysis. Why is it ‘the pioneer legend’? Although he is conducting something of an implicit argument with Ward’s ‘Australian legend’, Hirst does not spell out what it is that makes his diverse materials expressions of a singular legend. The ‘legend’ notion not only unifies pioneering histories. Its implication that these histories are essentially repetitions of a long-standing narrative or myth diminishes our sense of their usefulness as historical accounts. The concept of pioneering was capable of doing a great deal of work in providing a general sense of the past, and it was an especially powerful tool for the understanding of national and women’s history.

The idea that the legend is conservative follows from Hirst’s analysis of the legend’s genesis in the 1890s. But historical concepts are dynamic articulations of time: their politics should not be regarded as fixed by the conditions of their emergence. The material already quoted should suggest the diversity of positions possible in writing about pioneering. There is a considerable distance between Edward Shann and Zora Cross, yet both were contributing to pioneering history. More specifically, we can identify different versions of the pioneer legend among different social groups. John Tulloch has observed the class differences between alternative versions of the legend: squatters saw pioneering as the establishment of patriarchal civilisation in the wilderness, in opposition to urban divisiveness; whereas the selectors’ legend was about building a ‘privatised farm civilisation’ in opposition to the forces of the squattocracy and urban rapacity.¹ Hirst’s ‘invention of tradition’ argument would need to be much extended to account for this diversity of meanings; nor does it explain the continuing currency, growth, change and proliferation of the legend through the twentieth century.

My view is that pioneering history undoubtedly had non-conservative possibilities, but that it is probably misleading to regard it as democratic history. Democratic history must, by acknowledging their agency, put history at the disposal of people generally. It is more than simply a popular articulation of the past in the present: social or political agency must be explicitly attributed to all people, or all citizens. However,

although it was often populist, pioneering history's primary claim was not that 'the people' were the makers of history, but that 'the pioneers' were the makers of history. The pioneers were sometimes but not always identified with 'the people': there the argument was that 'the people' had made history precisely because they had been, or had become, pioneers. Pioneers were people transformed by land and labour; as they made the nation, they made themselves.

The distinction between pioneers and people who were not pioneers was actually the subject of much debate; it was, nonetheless, always a basic distinction. How was the distinction made? Tulloch notes the structural similarity between his 'squatting' and 'selecting' versions of the legend, which both celebrated some form of 'organic consensus'—civilised society—'defined as a place of mediation and synthesis between barbarous forces on either side'.

Another way of putting this is in terms of the frontier. The frontier was a historical 'hot zone', a distinct, fluid space where history was always in-the-making. Hancock wrote of 'the waves of pioneering which rush and break into 'better country farther out'. These were the overflow from bays of settlement in which there is a surface quiet. Here, for forty years or more, Australian democracy has been trying to freeze itself into the stillness of an isolated pond. Its efforts are in vain. The flimsy breakwaters of provincial prohibitions are constantly breached by the ocean swell of the world's impatient energy, and life, even in Melbourne or Sydney, is everlastingly agitated by the ebb and flow of adventure on the margins of Australian settlement.

The frontier defined the pioneer's identity in two ways. First, it was regarded as the boundary between white and black, a historical boundary in the sense that it marked the edge of knowledge, and the limit of disposability over history. On the other side of the frontier, it was supposed, was timeless nature. Second, the frontier divided whites into pioneers, who occupied the frontier, and non-pioneers, who had no experience of the frontier. Thus formed, pioneering identity supervened. Regional, cultural and class differences in rural life were rarely elaborated in the generalising histories of pioneering.

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1 Ibid., p. 354.
2 Australia, op. cit., p. 233.
In this context the ‘frontier’ is a geographical feature no less imagined than the activity of pioneering. It is where history is; it is an economic, racial, and temporal boundary, inevitable and absolute. Consider this passage from Barnard Eldershaw’s ‘A Mask of Australia’:

**HIS FUTURE:** What will you do in the future?

**THE BLACK MAN:** I do not know what the future is. I will always do what I do now. It is the only way to live.

**HIS FUTURE:** What if the land is taken away from you?

**CHORUS OF THE TREES:** It is not his land, but our land. He understands us and we understand him. We let him live. We are many and he is few.

**THE BLACK MAN:** How can it be taken away, it has always been there?

**HIS FUTURE:** White men will come from over the sea. They will take your hunting grounds to grow grain and graze flocks. You will have only the worst country. You will have to stay in one place. They will feed you, but life will be different.

**THE BLACK MAN:** We would die, but it could not happen.

**HIS FUTURE:** It will happen and the white man will sing your swan-song.

**THE BLACK MAN:** I have no swan-song. What is it?\textsuperscript{1}

This sort of thing was not unusual. In the Victorian *Centenary Gift Book* Mary E. Fullerton wrote of Aboriginal men on the Yarra: ‘They felt the dark approach of Change, were silent in the shade of things that had not been.’\textsuperscript{2} Such a frontier could only be imagined by a settler culture convinced of its own ‘fatal impact’ on Aboriginal people. The frontier divides black and white Australia completely. To take one further instance: in the fourth edition of *The Australasian School Atlas*, the frontier was illustrated in a series of maps depicting ‘inland exploration’. Some of these are reproduced here. They show explored parts of Australia printed a bright pale yellow, and the rest of the continent in black. K.R.Cramp’s introduction provided a narrative account of how all this happened: ‘Meanwhile the curtain of darkness was being slowly rolled back in the south-west....’\textsuperscript{3}

Famous explorers rather than settlers were the principal agents of Cramp’s history. In

\textsuperscript{1} My Australia, op. cit., p. 14.

\textsuperscript{2} Op. cit., p. 44.

these maps their travels somehow create a contiguous space of knowledge, steadily encircling and finally closing on the 'darkness'.\textsuperscript{1}

\textsuperscript{1} Cf. Paul Carter, \textit{The Road to Botany Bay}, \textit{op. cit.}. 
Pioneering History

Whether the frontier marks the boundaries of knowledge, as here, or of settlement, as in most writing about pioneering, it is usually a geographical feature located in the past. Hirst points accurately to the retrospective viewpoint assumed in early formulations of his pioneer legend. There is more to be said about this apparent nostalgia. In the twentieth century the frontier and the pioneering life were seen as threatened survivals of the past, as wilderness and endangered species are regarded now. It is the future which most concerns those arguing about the conservation of ‘nature’; similarly, much writing about pioneering managed to be historical and prospective at the same time. The continuities between the pioneering past, the residual present and the unknown future were discussed widely. In the 1945 preface to his book On the Wool Track, C.E.W. Bean wrote in this way about western New South Wales:

in that country ... the conditions were, till quite recently, no more than one step removed from those established by the pioneers who first settled on those age old plains.

It may be that the conditions there are still only two steps removed from those of the pioneers, and the people themselves only one step; indeed so far as one can see ahead the people there must always be pioneers in many respects—and, probably, therefore a source of strength for their nation.

Although they said different things about it, both Karl Cramp’s Atlas and Bean’s journalism presented the frontier in conventional times and places. Other accounts imagined the frontier in a number of ways, and imagined different kinds of pioneers inhabiting it. There is no inkling of this in Hirst, or in Rosemary Campbell’s otherwise excellent Heroes and Lovers, or in other current discussions. It is not surprising that the Australian National Dictionary limits the meaning of pioneering to the occupation of land. According to the Dictionary, to be a pioneer has meant to be ‘one of the first or early settlers in a district’. Pioneering has meant ‘the opening up of new country by settlers’.

2 Melbourne 1988, p. 481.
To describe most past and present Australian usage correctly, I think the definition should specify white settlers. Apart from the implications of that omission for Aboriginal history, the Dictionary's construction of the word would obviously exclude many white Australians from pioneering history. It is based on meanings derived from American usage. But there was, in the 1930s at least, a local refashioning of the word, involving what might be called a 'politics of pioneering' contesting issues of definition. Later in this chapter I look at three cultural artefacts, all to do with pioneering, all produced in connection with or in response to the 1938 celebrations, and all examples of a politics of pioneering in practice. The novel Pioneers on Parade, the historical essays in The Peaceful Army, and the Pioneers' Memorial Garden in Sydney provide the materials for an elaboration of the diverse collective histories, women's histories, and national histories which then came under the subject of pioneering. Before turning to these, however, I describe briefly two spectacles of pioneering produced for 1938. These indicate the general position of the 1938 celebrations in the field of pioneering history, and provide critical reference points for the arguments documented below.

Two Spectacles

March to Nationhood, the official film record of the celebrations, shows a re-enactment of an early nineteenth century tea party, held in the grounds of an old Sydney mansion.1 The spectacle was organised by the Australasian Pioneers' Club and the Women's Pioneer Society. This is the voice-over commentary from the film:

Vaucluse House, Sydney, formerly the home of Australia's great statesman William Charles Wentworth, is the lovely setting for an historical pageant depicting colonial society in Wentworth's day, enacted now by descendants of those early pioneers. The actual coaches of a century ago are used in a scene depicting the reception of guests by Mr and Mrs Wentworth. Many of the costumes are heirlooms of the period. Fashion plays its part in the history of nations, and this display of gallant men and women, who amid the hardships of a young colony, preserved the manners and customs and the civilised society of the motherland. Yet under the trappings of an old world they were already citizens of a

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1 The spectacle was reported in the Sydney Morning Herald's 'For Women' section, 7 March 1938, p. 4. It was part of the official celebrations programme.
new world. ... So Australia in 1938 looks back to the colourful days of the early colony, back to the splendid backdrop of a pioneering past.

There are several points to be made. There is nothing here about ‘clearing the land’, no image of that ‘foundation-laying’ which was depicted in the ‘Australia’s March to Nationhood’ pageant. In its references to fashion, gallantry, manners and civilised society, in its ‘tea party’ narrative, and in its Vaucluse House location, this spectacle is much closer to Robert Jeffery’s account of pioneering than, say, Barnard Eldershaw’s. Despite the emphasis on action in so much writing about pioneering, the main interest here is the identity of the pioneers. They make up an elite. Their pageant invites the film’s audience to look back, not forward, as in the ‘March to Nationhood’ pageant, or the visionary history of A Nation is Built. Pioneering is in the past; there is no utopian movement into the future—‘they were already citizens of a new world’. The splendid backdrop of a pioneering past is shown as the impressive Vaucluse House itself; as the words are spoken, we see a long shot of the building with the pageant in the foreground. There is another contrast with the spectacle of visionary history: the audience for this pageant have no place in the pageant themselves. They are not addressed by it; they have no place in the historical scheme it presents; their presence is no affirmation of what it depicts, as the presence of the crowd affirmed Phillip’s vision of a multitude of future citizens on 26 January. The pageant does not tell the audience what their relationship to this history is. The voice-over claims that the display evokes ‘memories’ of the pioneers, but it is hard to take the suggestion seriously, since few in the audience could possibly have such memories.
This pioneering pageant could be seen as an ‘intransitive’ kind of public spectacle, where, although the drama is produced for a public audience, it does not explicitly address this audience. The pageant is performed as though there were no audience. But this is not in order to convey the impression that the audience is watching a real colonial tea party (which would have no audience) rather than a performance of a tea party (which would be pointless without an audience). The voice-over is almost all about the details of the staging—the identity of the pioneers, the actuality of their props, the character of their ‘backdrop’. In fact the performers and their props are described as the real attraction of the pageant, rather than any drama they might enact. It is their relationship to history which is accounted for. The film asserts the importance of recognising the real descendants of the pioneers and their genuine belongings. It displays a curiously private form of national history, wherein inherited names and possessions provide the link with the past. The main appeal for an audience without these things, apart from the evocation of dubious memories, is ‘colour’.

The film does not make clear why it is significant that the players are related to their characters, or whether, in particular, they have inherited something other than names and heirlooms. But it points to the idea of the ‘pioneering family’ used in *The Squatter’s Daughter*, *Heritage*, and Mowle’s genealogy. The notion of the ‘pioneering family’ assumes that historical significance is a biological phenomenon, something to do
Pioneering History

with blood; that the pioneering identity is an inherited characteristic;
and that the word ‘pioneer’ is a personal designation to which one may
almost succeed.

The ‘pioneering family’ was in evidence in other kinds of public
performance from 1938. The Women’s Pioneer Society organised a
Pioneers Ball for the evening of 28 January, which the *Sydney Morning
Herald* expected would be ‘one of the outstanding social events of the
150th Anniversary celebrations’. The *Herald* reported what was
obviously going to be an exclusive occasion, the introduction of thirty-
six debutantes into the most respectable Sydney circles. Yet this was also
a public spectacle in that the newspaper’s general readership was invited
to admire the debutantes and the ball. In order to make this possible
readers were given the usual social page details: names, family
identities, clothes and jewellery. Because this was a ‘Pioneers Ball’ these
things had a particular significance. ‘Most of [the debutantes] are
descendants of early Australian and New Zealand pioneers’. Short
genealogies for nineteen were included. The *Herald* announced that
dancers have been asked to wear costumes of the period, 1788 to 1888,
and it is expected that many lovely heirloom frocks will be seen.’ The
great-great-granddaughters of officers, settlers, colonial politicians and
administrators would also be wearing ‘heirloom jewellery or fans’.

THE MISSSES EMILY AND ANNE ROTHERY trace their
ancestry back to Frederick John Rothery, who came to
Australia in 1831, and who was one of the first pioneers
to settle over the Blue Mountains. He was awarded a
grant of land near Bathurst. Miss Emily Rothery will
wear a white taffeta dress and will carry a pink posy, and,
as an ornament, her grandmother’s chain and locket.
Miss Anne Rothery’s dress will be similar to her sister’s,
but her posy will be blue. She will be wearing an
heirloom in the form of a cameo brooch, depicting
Romeo and Juliet, which brooch is over 400 years old.2

The *Sydney Morning Herald* of 27 January was largely taken over with
reports of the anniversary spectacles of the day before. In a newspaper
thus devoted to historical spectacle, this description was the only
significant appearance of women as historically notable figures. It was
however no celebration of that ‘splendid heritage of courage and
initiative’ which Frances Fraser wrote about. The genealogy of Emily
and Anne Rothery may well have established their family’s pioneering

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2 *Ibid.* The brooch was made at least fifty years before Shakespeare’s play was
written.
credentials, but it also traces an unspoken metamorphosis, which has turned the Rothery women from frontier heroines into upper-crust decorations.

Like the tea party at Vaucluse House, the Pioneers Ball was about the kind of people pioneers and their descendants were. It was not about the things that the pioneers had done, despite the conventional interest of pioneering histories in actual labour and suffering. These spectacles were not histories of deeds. Nor were they collective histories, since they were so given over to the relationships between individuals and families. This contradiction between the expectations of pioneering history and the actual representation of pioneers in the present was taken up in the most extended contemporary criticism of the 1938 celebrations, a novel by Miles Franklin and Dymphna Cusack. Franklin and Cusack had their own objections to those events, and these are worth setting down. Their book was a fierce nationalist rejoinder to 1938; it now provides a rare alternative commentary which requires careful assessment. Pioneers on Parade is doubly useful because while it was particularly directed at the kind of public spectacle I have just described, it was also written entirely within the framework of pioneering history. It was both a hostile sermon on the celebrations and an unqualified eulogy to pioneering. So an analysis of the book extends our knowledge, both of the character of the celebrations and of the historical meaning of pioneering in the 1930s.

Pioneers on Parade

The novel uses burlesque to press the claims of an Australian tradition in opposition to the imperialist myth-making of the official celebrations. It deals with the contemporary standing of the pioneering past, and it adjudicates between the fabrication of history and the vitality of tradition. 'We have a grand tradition. We don’t need to manufacture one. But the tradition we should be proud of is not the one the officials like to glorify...’ says one character.¹ The issue in the novel is always between a past which is claimed to be authentic, in this case rooted in the experience over generations of a clear-eyed ordinary Australian family, and a bogus one, ‘manufactured’ to please the British and their colonially-minded local followers. On one side, the culture of rural struggle; on the other, a distanced, imperial romanticisation. It was an antinomy later observed by Russel Ward in The Australian Legend.

The novel stresses the hollowness of the celebrations: 'The official rhetoric, empty as the wind, was being appropriately applauded.'¹ It argues for the celebration of real instead of bogus history, of pioneers, not visiting aristocrats. It seeks a commemoration of honest labour, of a pioneer’s ‘three quarters of a century of struggle with real things’.² A cluster of virtues is attached to the character of the pioneer: reality, authenticity, honesty, labour, struggle. The opposites of these values are found in the official celebrations. There is a tension between pioneering and parading, and parades are ultimately rejected. The novel proposes a moral frame of judgement; but there are points where some of the apparently clear distinctions become obscure.

Although its authors now occupy secure places in the Australian literary canon, *Pioneers on Parade* is not a well-regarded novel. Drusilla Modjeska dismisses it as ‘rather forced satire’,³ H.M. Green as ‘a burlesque ... faintly amusing in its crude way.’⁴ One specific point of interest is the question of the book’s satirical clarity. In a recent paper on the novel, Robert Darby points out that in some places the reader has difficulty knowing what is supposed to be taken as satire and what is intended to be serious.⁵ Apparently serious passages seem obviously exaggerated or hackneyed, so present-day readers are unsure of the authors’ intentions. We know they wanted to criticise the anniversary events; but when the book refers, for example, to Australia as a ‘happy, isolated young country’ is it satirising empty official rhetoric, or expressing the authors’ own sincere nationalist sentiment?

There may not be much distance between the two. If the pioneering tradition which the book invokes is in fact closely linked to the official history it contests, there is little to be gained from attempting to delineate its satirical project more clearly, either by close reading or by historical research into Miles Franklin’s and Dymphna Cusack’s actual intentions. *Pioneers on Parade* asks to be read as critical commentary on 1938, and as such it has its uses: it is worth comparing what the book says about the celebrations with what can be learnt elsewhere. But it does not always work as critique. Although Franklin and Cusack always maintain their oppositional stance, sometimes this is at the cost of a sharper delineation of the festivities.

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³ *Exiles at Home*, op. cit., p. 206.
⁵ ‘*Pioneers on Parade*’, unpublished paper, p.[34].
The book needs to be read as a text written within the genre of pioneering history, using melodrama in a way which does not allow any clear boundary between satire and seriousness. The book’s occasional unintelligibility is the result of its rhetorical excessiveness, the forcedness or crudity observed by Modjeska and Green. The point is not to emphasise Franklin and Cusack’s inability to recognise the mythical nature of their own writing, but to indicate the extent to which their Australian history was a reworking of generally circulated ideas about pioneering histories, and to use their writing to draw out those histories’ moral and political assumptions. If their rhetorical excess constitutes a literary failure, it also provides intriguing material for cultural-historical analysis.

*Pioneers on Parade* tells the story of the du Mont-Brankstons, an affluent Sydney family on the edge of high society. They are anxious to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the 1938 celebrations for serious social climbing. Audrey is particularly grasping: she has used her positions on celebrations committees to attract attention to herself, and wants to marry her daughter Primrose off to one of the visiting English aristocrats. George, a businessman, hopes for a knighthood.

But this shamelessly snobbish family incorporates divisions which are most significant in the development of the novel. Audrey grew up in the city; she is the descendant of a roguish English army officer; her ambition is unrelenting and unmitigated. George is from the bush, and is beginning to tire of the city. ‘He had left the land early for the bank, and from there had gone into real estate and various companies. From then on his life had been a petrifcation rather than a growth.’¹ He has tired of his pursuit of always greater prosperity and always greater respectability, and he thinks nostalgically of the bush. He finds himself ‘reverting to type—to the good old bush, and democracy, and mateship, and all the rest of it’.² This difference between George and Audrey is presented as class difference; Audrey believes that she married beneath her. The implication of this divide for all the book’s characters form the real subject of *Pioneers on Parade*. The novel’s descriptions of the Sydney social scene elaborate it; its plot turns upon it.

George and Audrey are members of the League of Early Free Settlers’ Descendants, the Society for Purer Australian History, and the Loyal Empire Society. They are both involved in planning the celebrations. Audrey is prominent in the Women’s Advisory Committee of Hospitality and Arrangements. To her dismay George uses his position

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on one committee to officially invite his Aunt Lucy, who lives on the family property near Goulburn, to Sydney for the celebrations. Aunt Lucy is a genuine pioneer. Her family were early free settlers, and have worked their original grant through several generations. She has run the property herself since the early death of her husband. She also looks like a pioneer. Her hands are 'leathery and seamed', her face is 'brown as a half-caste's and criss-crossed with lines like a mud tank in a drought'. Audrey knows that Aunt Lucy is no social asset. She thinks of her as 'insufferably bucolic'. Aunt Lucy enjoys no kind of prominence. She has merely worked hard on the land all her life. Primrose is horrified as well. 'It's definitely ghastly!' she says. 'Old Aunt Lucy is a prize specimen of a woop. She'll probably bring down a pig or two.'

George has invited her precisely because she is a real pioneer. The important factor is class. George wants a recognition of the worth of labouring lives, as opposed to leisured ones. 'She's more deserving of honour than those people who only draw dividends from the land. ... Hang it all, Aunt Lucy has stuck to the one place and worked it with her own hands since she could crawl.' Above all, Aunt Lucy has suffered: her children, all sons, are dead, four in the war and one in a car accident. She has brought her grandson Willie up herself, teaching him to be honest, chaste and hard-working. Willie is tall, strong, and 'not tanned, [but] cooked—black'.

George has been trying to give the pioneers more prominence in the anniversary. He has said they should have their own stand to view the 26 January pageant, and that the Government should make pioneers over the age of eighty its guests. Aunt Lucy pays her own way to Sydney: the Government has become concerned about public criticism of the costs of keeping official guests and travelling politicians. 'What does pioneering signify if not that genuine pioneers, like geniuses, have to bear their own as well as national burdens?' Points about hospitality and its costs are part of the novel's continuing argument against the official celebrations. Government House provides free accommodation for people who 'could well afford to go to a hotel and pay for their lodgings'; pioneers like Aunt Lucy are generous hosts who never turn a hungry traveller away.

1 Ibid., p. 7.
2 Ibid., p. 8.
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid., p. 31.
6 Ibid., p. 25.
Much to Audrey's surprise Aunt Lucy and William prove to be real social assets. 'Pioneering had become a cult among the cliques; it had class nowadays.' Their free-born ancestors are important: 'Felonry, of whatever virtue, was taboo in the pioneerage'. The du Mont-Brankstons are invited to all the important occasions. Primrose falls in love with a handsome British officer, the Honourable Ninian Skimpole-Blaise, who is a Governor's aide-de-camp. Willie falls for the beautiful but neurasthenic Lady Lucy Horsehurst, daughter of the visiting Earl of Cravenburn. They all spend a weekend at Palm Beach, together with Greg, a serious young doctor who is passionately committed to improving the health of Sydney's poor. Greg is an old admirer of Primrose, but cannot compete with the glamorous Ninian. It is a conventional love triangle in terms of Australian melodrama, owing much especially to Praed's *Policy and Passion*: the raw, earnest Australian man, the attractive, exotic Englishman, with the anglophile Australian woman in the middle. 'What had [Greg] to offer? At best a scanty and uncertain income, a life companion chained to unremitting hard work, a man with a mad and unfashionable crusading spirit, and an uncomfortable honesty that considered Prim's development as an individual of greater importance than her social success.'

Greg argues with Aunt Lucy, Lord Cravenburn and Audrey about Australia and the Empire. Should Australia's exports to Britain be limited? Audrey assures Cravenburn 'anything that England decides to do, we know is right'. Aunt Lucy and Greg disagree. Aunt Lucy criticises any outside intervention in farmers' business: 'I don't need any treaty to tell me what my place should produce', she says. 'The city people wouldn't know a paddock of oats from one of lucerne and yet they tell us what to grow and when to grow it.' Greg is outraged by imperial exploitation. 'Australia must become a country for Australians, not a half-empty continent bled to keep a plutocracy in leisured wealth in the capitals or abroad, not a country of vast holdings run by a few hard-working, embittered men whose job is to squeeze the land and the people who work on it to produce fat dividends for investors who've never seen a sheep or a paddock of wheat. An astonishing country—for investors!' The novel's class politics, therefore, are also anti-imperial. They are in the national interest, as the writers perceive it. There is a moral component to this anti-imperialism. It emerges that Lady Lucy and Ninian are depraved hedonists. They are contemptuous of middle

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3 *Ibid*.
class morality; in their pursuit of Willie and Primrose marriage is the last thing on their minds.

Meanwhile the ‘sesqui’, as the book calls it, is in full swing. Watching the re-enactment of Phillip’s landing with Lord Cravenburn, Greg deplores the foolish artificiality of the history being performed.

‘They should have called it the pageant of Australian snake yarns,’ Greg declared contemptuously. ‘By the time the two-hundredth anniversary comes along, our first settlers will probably have descended from the skies in chariots of fire after virgin birth.’

‘I take it you are not in sympathy with the official desire to manufacture a grand tradition.’

Greg snorted as the small boats from the Supply anchored and drew up at the wharf. ‘We have a grand tradition. We don’t need to manufacture one. But the tradition we should be proud of is not the one the officials like to glorify—all the rum-runners and Rum-corps and land robbers.’

From Farm Cove the book proceeds to a critique of the Women’s Advisory Council, described as an unwieldy association of ‘all the oddments of women’s organizations’. The women’s conference is pompous and full of platitudes, expounding only the thin rhetoric of Anzac, motherhood and imperial patriotism.

Cravenburn, Lady Lucy, Ninian, Greg and the du Mont-Brankstons stay with Aunt Lucy and Willie on their property, Pine Grove. Primrose discovers how abandoned Ninian is and gives up on him. But Lady Lucy almost goes mad trying to seduce the completely naive Willie. She finally decides she will have to marry him. Audrey is disappointed over Primrose’s decision to give up the social scene for university, but thrilled with Lucy. The wedding plans, however, are ruined when a routine check of the Brankstons’ ancestry reveals that they are descended, not after all from free settlers, but from convicts. Everyone is mortified.

Worst of all, the Brankston’s ancestors come from the same English village as the Cravenburns. One stole a currant bun; one rode a farm horse without permission for a mile. These were probably crimes

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against the Cravenburns! Aunt Lucy is utterly humiliated and also very angry.

‘People who could starve a young girl so that she stole a currant bun, for no one will take food unless they are hungry, and all God’s creatures have a right to eat. I’ve always fed everyone about me as much as they could swallow. To send a man out branded as a felon for life because he took a ride on a draught-horse—no one would get on a draught-horse unless he had to—I could never forgive people for that. Bringing life-long disgrace on them and on their descendants for trifles like that! They had no right to have such power. And to use it like that! Worse than Hitler, they are!’

‘Of course, Aunt Lucy,’ said George, trying to calm her, ‘it was a long time ago and times were very different.’

‘I don’t see that they are so different. I’ve worked all my life, and Lady Lucy can’t even dress herself. ...I’ll admit I was carried away by her pretty ways, but this trial has been sent by God to protect us from vanity and conceit.’

The trials of the other characters open their eyes too. Primrose is sobered by her brush with Ninian, and decides to study medicine at university. George will go back to the land. He refuses a knighthood, to Audrey’s disgust, saying that imperial honours are outworn decorations which cheapen Australians. The only deserving people, in any case, are ‘some of the dead pioneers—convicts among them’.

In the end, and despite all opposition, Lady Lucy insists on marrying Willie. The land will be the final destination for George, Aunt Lucy, Lady Lucy, and William. Perhaps marriage and the land will redeem Lady Lucy.

Pine Grove had belonged to the Brankstons for over a hundred years: whatever the misdemeanours of their forebears they had all been honest with and honest on the land. The land would be there for ever and ever; the hills everlasting. The land would be there for William and Lucy and their children, they would continue in the

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1 Ibid., p. 204.
2 Ibid., p. 252.
3 Ibid., p. 262.
sturdy Australian tradition which her people had begun. No man could do more.1

The point of Pioneers on Parade is that the example of the pioneer’s honesty may also open our eyes—the readers’ eyes—to the differences between an authentic history and ‘vanity and conceit’. The book’s frame of moral judgement is derived from the personal and family histories of key characters; from this in turn a critical commentary on 1938 is produced, which is at many points persuasive. The novel plays on the imperial rhetoric of events—a subject I have discussed already—by contrasting the fawning anglophilia of Sydney ‘Society’ with the mediocrity and metropolitan chauvinism of the British official visitors. The Earl de la Warr was indeed an undistinguished figure. Pioneers on Parade attacks the British visitors’ attitudes to Australia; and the Earl did say some vapid, condescending things. On an edition of Movietone News, for example, he gave ‘his impressions’ in an ‘informal interview’. Reading from notes in the garden of Government House, he said

‘Heaven knows there’s at least as much adventure ahead of us as ever Captain Phillip and your other pioneers had to face. There’s certainly no excuse for being bored or not interested. There’s something waiting for all of us to do, and in every sphere of life ... this is the spirit that’s taking you forward. Australia and Australians are essentially alive and that is why you’ve done so much already and why your many friends look to your future with the hope of there being at least as good to come if not a great deal better.’

As the novel says, convict history was evaded. In Pioneers on Parade, convict history is anti-imperial history. The recognition of the colonial past is shaming and painful for the descendants of convicts, but actually does more damage to the reputation of the British visitors. In fact a convict heritage should be a source of pride, according to the novel, because convict history is a truthful account of white Australia, and also the most glorious one. Here convict history provides national historical triumphalism with a moral basis. Greg is the voice of convict history:

‘Starved and driven to stealing a currant bun by a lot of bloody landlords who never knew what it was to want for anything. They lived in a castle on the money their labourers won for them in the sweat of their half-starved

1 Ibid., p. 264.
bodies ... and they’re sent out here ... they marry, and work the land ... they build up property ... they rear a decent family. In three generations they produce Aunt Lucy—and in five they produce you. [He is speaking to William.] Isn’t that something to be proud of? A miracle in a century and a half.¹

The evasion of convict history is itself the product of a colonial mentality. ‘It’s the old story over again’, Greg says, ‘the bondage to foreign ideas’.² And if the truth is painful for the Brankstons, it is not too painful; their ancestors’ crimes were piteous rather than awful. In this the Brankstons are lucky, as the novel admits: ‘It was generally thought that ninety per cent of the early immigrants had been sent out for trivial offences, whereas those old jokers in the Historical Society had no end of awkward information to prove that the percentages had been the reverse.’³

Moreover the class conflict which was dramatised in the novel as an opposition between recognition of the labour of pioneers and the claims of distinguished visitors was felt in the actual organisation of the celebrations. In the novel George tries to make the celebrations more accessible to genuine pioneers. In actuality the Secretary of the Celebrations Council’s Invitations Committee did write to a correspondent: ‘[we are] unable to comply with your request that the descendants of pioneering families should be seated in stands erected along the line of route of the Pageant.’ The reason he gave was ‘the great number of persons whose position entitles them to invitations.’⁴

*Pioneers on Parade* elaborates on the class bias of the proceedings. It lampoons the Royal Empire Society, the Royal Australian Historical Society, and the Australasian Pioneers Club. These become the ‘Loyal Empire Society’, the ‘Society for Purer Australian History’ and the ‘League of Early Free Settlers’ Descendants’. It ridicules a speaker at the women’s conference advocating bigger families, especially for poor women. ‘The poor, she said, always managed very well, and she loved to see a line of baby’s washing in the working-class districts. This was heartily applauded by the elderly from the high-class suburbs.’⁵ The argument is that the celebrations and all the events associated with them are removed from the reality of everyday struggles.

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This kind of criticism is reinforced from other sources. To turn back to the pioneers' float in the 'Australia's March to Nationhood' pageant, for example: the float was supposed to depict an utterly familiar scene, pioneers clearing the land and building their homes. But a New Zealand Government observer, taking notes with New Zealand's 1940 centenary in mind, wrote that 'Although there were numerous floats depicting the work of the pioneers, we saw too often the result of their labours rather than the struggle for attainment ... [the pioneers] were too often enjoying their leisure rather than struggling with nature.'

At other points, however, the book seems to strike only glancing blows at official snake yarns. More: despite its avowed interest in authentic tradition, sometimes the object of its critique seems set-up, ready-made for the purpose. There is an evasiveness on the part of the authors concerning their own place in the events they criticise. Franklin and Cusack apparently conceived the idea of the novel at a garden party held at Government House as part of the festivities. In the novel, Primrose attends a vice-regal garden party, and some time afterwards complains that in the celebrations 'there were no Australian writers—I'd like to have seen some of them myself. I had to tell Lord Cravenburn that all the good Australian writers were dead or in Western Australia.' The celebrations are presented as indifferent to Australian culture. But in some small and some large ways they did sponsor painting, architecture, sculpture, drawing and writing, through commissioned works, official publications and competitions. Both Franklin and Cusack were contributors to *The Peaceful Army*, which was an official memorial to women pioneers.

There is the attack on the disproportionate recognition given to leisured imperial visitors, who are characterised in unfavourable contrast with the hard working pioneers. This raises other questions. As we have seen, there was some basis for this criticism. But we also know that pioneering was widely and thoroughly celebrated. *Pioneers on Parade* itself observes that 'Pioneering had become a cult among the cliques; it had class nowadays.' It interprets this vogue as the enthusiasm of self-interested 'pure merinos', opportunists 'using their past—properly censored of course—to propel their present and their future'. But it also acknowledges that the 'pioneerage' numbers any 'descendants of

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2 See Robert Darby, *op. cit.*, pp. [3-4].
free settlers, however humble or undesirable'.

Nevertheless *Pioneers on Parade* argues that 1938 celebrated false pioneers rather than true ones. Audrey’s social rivals, the Pelham-Booths, are invited to represent ‘the squatter pioneers’ in the 26 January pageant. Audrey is incensed. ‘The squatter pioneers indeed! What did their ancestors pioneer, I’d like to know. They made their money out of frozen rabbits, that’s the nearest they ever got to the land.’ The Pelham-Booths pretend to be pioneers; they have really been favoured because of their social position. ‘First the knighthood, now this’, Audrey rages.

*Pioneers on Parade* is not about historical pioneering as such—the labour and suffering of the white frontier—but, like the Vaucluse House pageant and the Ball, it is about the state and status of being a pioneer: the pioneering identity and its moral attributes. These are embodied for all to see in Aunt Lucy, and they also manifest themselves in the basic decency of George, William and Primrose. They can be inherited. The central issue of pioneering identity, as the case of the Pelham-Booths readily illustrates, is its authenticity or otherwise. The book argues that class identity masquerades as pioneering identity; that the city bourgeois finds respectability in the guise of the pioneer. Yet here the book seems to be asking for something other than a truthful or authentic history. It seems to be arguing for actual pioneers. Although it is obvious that the Pelham-Booths are not pioneers, this is the very thing Audrey finds objectionable. Their pioneering identity has nothing to do with their social posturing, or their wealth, or any other things they may have done. They are not pioneers, and they should not pretend to be pioneers, because their ancestors were not pioneers.

*Pioneers on Parade* takes a particular position on the relationship between past and present. We have seen that it objects to inauthentic histories, such as the Farm Cove re-enactment, which is a ‘snake yarn’. It appears that it also objects to any presentation of a past which is not genuine. It objects to representations of pioneering in principle, because a representation of something, however authentic, is not what it

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represents.\(^1\) The novel does not call for authentic accounts of pioneering; what it wants is pioneering itself. Usually an insistence on producing the ‘genuine’ past in the present is absurd, because the people and artefacts which have constituted even a recent past are inevitably transformed by time. Only time travel, if it were possible, would restore the past. In *Pioneers on Parade*, however, the essential character of the pioneers of the past is supposed to exist in the present in pioneering identity, inherited across generations, transcending time. This is the genuine past. It is not to do with parades or celebrations. It is do with actual hard work, independence, and democratic sentiment. It is prized nevertheless in the same way as those names and objects displayed at Vaucluse House were—as manifest, indisputable, real history.

It should be very difficult to make a case in a novel for this kind of genuine past, since the act of writing must involve describing the past, transforming it into an account. Such writing may be authentic, in the sense that it may be correct in every detail, but this only makes it a more convincing history, rather than the pioneering past itself. What is the difference between a novel presenting an imitation in words of real, hard-working pioneers and the Pelham-Booths imitating them in a parade? If there is to be a difference, the novel itself must have some special relationship with pioneering reality, distinguishing it from other works purporting to represent pioneering. Miles Franklin touched on the general problem in a radio talk on ‘Novels of the Bush’ which was printed in P.R. Stephensen’s *Australian Mercury* in 1935. Here she discussed novels which she thought had ‘done service in crystallising reality—that spiritual and national reality which, complexly, must be reflected in our art before it becomes part of our consciousness’, or, as she also put it, ‘bush novels deserving of the high classification because they have extracted the essence of the land’.\(^2\)

These were not intended to be statements of a theory of writing, or even of a consistent argument about writing (should bush writing ‘reflect’ or ‘crystallise’ reality?), but they do indicate a desire to link writing directly with the ‘essence’ of the nation or the country. The best writing about the bush, one imagines, would be of the bush rather than about it. Franklin assumes that ‘the bush novel’ is, or should be, written in the bush. ‘Compare the conditions under which a *Forsyte Saga* was produced with those of the writers of the bush novel, and it will be conceded that to tackle a novel under the usual bush conditions is

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\(^1\) On some of the supposed merits of the genuine past as opposed to even its authentic reproduction, see David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country*, Cambridge 1985, pp. 293-4.

indeed heroic. ’ Bush writing is itself a kind of pioneering. It is hard work, and the results are patchy, ‘partly due to the working of a new environment—making our ore malleable—and also to the conditions under which we have to work’. It is the ‘hardy pioneer in Australian literature’ and part of the national history: ‘The bush novel has been an inevitable and indispensable factor in our national development.’

Pioneers on Parade is a bush novel written against urban public spectacle. Pursuing Miles Franklin’s thought that the bush novel might be regarded as a literary reification of the pioneer, we could see urban spectacle, in this book an alternative, inferior form, as the characteristic expression of the parasitic, debased city person, the familiar creature of appearances and extravagance. This clarifies Pioneers on Parade’s position against spectacle. Although the urban spectacle of 1938 ostensibly celebrated national development, according to the novel it was actually the work of colonial and class prejudice. The book continually plays upon this difference between what ostensibly and what really was the case. ‘All this social pretence-decadence’ says Prim, discovering that Lord Cravenburn’s attentions are less than honourable. ‘If we can’t start anew and better in a whole unspoiled continent of our own, we’re as doomed as Europe’.1

There is an explanation in the novel for her earlier attraction to pretence-decadence. ‘Old world existence’ includes the seduction of ‘beauty and romance and glamour’.2 Pioneers on Parade offers readers romance according to other conventions: the old pioneer woman whose sons have died in the war and the pure, handsome, manly bushman (‘an unbroached man ... one of self-evident masculinity’3) are never other than what they seem. This kind of Australian romance, whatever its connection with any crystallised spiritual and national reality, was an important part of a great deal of writing about pioneering. It is enough here to note the romantic element in Franklin and Cusack’s novel; romance reappears as an issue in the Pioneers Memorial Garden, below.

To turn back to my earlier argument: what distinguishes the nationalist critique of 1938 in Pioneers on Parade is its steadfastly private point of view. It adopts a family’s perspective on the celebrations. If the novel’s scattered suggestions about ‘real history’ were taken together, they would say something like this: the real history of the nation, as opposed to a bogus one, is the history of pioneering families. Pioneering identity

2 Ibid.
3 Ibid., p. 120.
is inherited, and pioneering history continues through a descendant’s inheritance of property and character, and that descendant’s own production of heirs. The pioneering collective is a private one, and the ‘space of experience’ opened up by pioneering histories is an exclusive, but national past. Thus the plot turns upon possible marriages, the resolution of the Pine Grove inheritance and the continuation of the Brankston family. Although the 1938 celebrations are the critical focus of the book, their function in the narrative is very simple: they provide possible partners from overseas for the young Brankstons, and they expose the conflict between Audrey and George. There is no suggestion of a public critique of the celebrations, no critique from the point of view of any of the audiences for historical spectacle and very little reported from any of the participants in the public events which the characters observe.

Indeed, the novel implies that the popular audiences have little judgement. George’s considered view is that ‘This sesqui display was a repetition of the old bread-and-circus rackets designed to distract the masses’, and that youth has been ‘led astray’ by gaudy uniforms, so ‘by the time men came to enjoy the real beauty of the earth they were entangled in less worthy things’. In the notion of a ‘bread-and-circus racket’ the pessimistic disdain for the audiences as well as the organisers of spectacle is undiminished by classical allusion. On the subject of what he calls Juvenal’s ‘derisive’ phrase, the historian G.E.M. de Ste. Croix says ‘I myself find it hard to understand why so many of those who have written about the Roman world have thought it discreditable to the humble Roman that his prime concern should have been bread. I see no reason to think that the attitude of the common people was unpleasantly materialistic or degraded just because they thought first of filling their bellies.’ On the first and second of February, 1938, as part of the anniversary, more than two thousand ‘needy citizens’ of Sydney received free meals from the City Council and the Lord Mayor, Alderman Nock, according to the Sydney Morning Herald. They ate vegetable soup, roast beef and vegetables, and plum pudding or rock melon and ice cream, with beer and soft drinks and tea or coffee. Each man was given a large packet of cigarettes, each woman a handkerchief and each child a box of sweets.

My argument does not depend on interpreting George’s view as the authors’. The point is that it is always either the narrative itself or a member of the Brankston family circle who puts events in their real

3 Sydney Morning Herald, 3 February 1938, p. 7.
context, whether it is electoral politics, imperial relations, or increasing international militarism. The views they have about all these things were actually put by others in the course of the celebrations, but these criticisms from the public sphere rarely appear in the novel, even when they were voiced at events which the novel discusses. The women's conference is an example. This is presented in the novel as a dreary, conservative occasion notable for imperial and class prejudice. I have already quoted the passage where well-off women urge working class mothers to have more children. However this was not the story which was run in the *Sydney Morning Herald* at the time. There Enid Lyons was quoted speaking of mothers being 'like the platypus, almost in danger of extinction'. Lyons did make much of the 'pressing problem' of Australia's declining birth-rate, but she also spoke about the economic burden of children for poorer families. She argued, admittedly in very general terms, for child endowment.¹

The conference was not anti-imperial, but nor was it clearly pro-imperial. 'We are trying to look at things from their international aspect', said Mildred Muscio, talking about the conference's purposes. 'Women have always been rebels, as all reformers are; they refuse to believe that there is any necessity for war in the world or that there is any reason why people should go hungry.'² A visitor from England maintained that 'We [women] have ways of looking at things that are of definite value to the Empire';³ her statement could be counterposed with a message delivered to the conference from Madame Chiang Kai-chek:

>'If there has been indifference in our hearts, or too strong a personal ambition, or a tendency to follow the line of least resistance, the beaten track of international conferences, meetings and more meetings, at which long strings of beautiful words are said, but very little practical work is ever accomplished—let us confess that this is not the way to save the world. ...

>'The forces arrayed against peace are colossal. So long as profit can be derived from war, so long as military aggression is met with indifference on our part, war and all the misery it entails will continue unabated.'

>'... The title of the conference, “This Changing World,” must, she thought, have been chosen a long

1 4 February 1938, p. 4.
time ago, for in it there was something cheerful and hopeful. Now this changing world seemed to be entirely out of control and to be rolling towards self-destruction with breath-taking rapidity.¹

This speech is reproduced in Pioneers on Parade, much as it appeared in the Sydney Morning Herald.² But on the whole the novel makes very little reference to the currents of public criticism actually generated by 1938. Since it is the private world of the pioneering family which provides a judicial perspective on events, the novel’s hostility to public spectacle is not surprising.

Even so, it provides a full statement of the very ideas—the notions of the genuine past, and national history as family history—which were at work in those spectacles of elite pioneering discussed earlier. The contribution of Pioneers on Parade was to identify these spectacles with an anglo-oriented social elite, and to propose a national history to take the place of imperial mystification. Yet this is only half the story of the politics of pioneering. It is notable that although most of the main characters in Franklin and Cusack’s novel are women, no claims are made for the national importance of recognising the history of women pioneers. Women’s involvement in the anniversary is thoroughly mocked, and the book’s claims for an oppositional national history rest on the revelation of repressed convict history, not women’s history.

The Peaceful Army

In other work, women were generally seen as particularly important in pioneering history. Apart from the stronger arguments of Zora Cross and the Australian Women’s Weekly, acknowledgements of the special significance of women pioneers appeared frequently across the range of 1930s historical culture. There is some evidence suggesting that this acknowledgement was highly conventional, that is, that it was a generally expected part of pioneering history. In her article ‘Pioneering Still Goes On’, published in The Peaceful Army, Kylie Tennant wrote about the diffusion of Henry Lawson’s classic pioneer woman character, always a settler.

    In any number of stories, simple, lovable, pathetic, he hammered out the type of the bush woman, her strength, independence and patience, until, if you say

¹ Ibid., 5 February 1938, p. 19.
² The Pioneers on Parade version is on pp. 82-3.
'pioneer women,' the vague response is likely to be, 'Oh yes, I know, 'Women of the West' and all that sort of thing. My grandmother was one. Had thirteen children and worked like a slave. Marvellous old girl.'

A scene in Charles Chauvel's film *Heritage* has a 1930s pioneer from the Northern Territory making a speech in Parliament. He describes the pioneers of the past:

... [Our pioneers] sacrificed time and life. But, gentlemen, those men were one, in thoughts and in action, and their women [pause] were homemakers, and civilisers!

**ALL:** Hear, hear! Hear hear! [General applause]

The speech is interrupted by applause at only one other point ('Gentlemen—the bonds that bind us to the Empire should be bonds of steel!'). Its appearance here seems suspiciously dutiful. The predictability of speeches praising pioneer women is also suggested in this account of one from *Pioneers on Parade*:

'What, I ask you, would Australia have done without these women—faithful helpmates of their husbands, mothers of magnificent sons—those sons who made Australia a nation at Anzac?'

Prim wondered what Aunt Lucy was thinking.... Was she bored and irritated? No, when the Chair had finished, the weather-beaten face lifted and showed that she was stimulated and touched by it all.

These statements are clearly remarkable for their lack of any radical surprise: if it was democratic to include women in this way, it was obviously not startlingly so. But a history of women's pioneering could be imagined in a way which did not turn so conveniently into easy speech-making. An extended treatment of this kind of history can be found in Flora Eldershaw's collection *The Peaceful Army*, which I quoted above. The book was a memorial to Australian pioneer women, and was published by the Women's Executive Committee and the Women's Advisory Council, adjuncts to the main 1938 celebrations.

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administration. Flora Eldershaw was a member of the Advisory Council.

Kylie Tennant’s chapter ‘Pioneering Still Goes On’ makes clear what the book does with the concept of pioneering. Tennant does not accept the standard definition of pioneering as the settlement of land. The usefulness of a word denoting any settler in the bush must be dubious, as Marilyn Lake has recently claimed:

it is nonsensical—in analytical terms—to group women as diverse as landowners’ wives, squatters’ sisters, selectors’ wives and daughters and the de facto wives of timber workers together simply because they lived close to the bush.¹

But pioneering histories did provide a meaningful way of grouping these and other ‘diverse’ women together. They could all be regarded as pioneers, because all could be seen as agents in the transformation of the bush and the making of the nation. Unlike Lake, Tennant did not reject the category of the pioneer woman, but decided that the bush might be merely incidental to pioneering history. She made explicit the idea of the pioneer as a historical agent, a person who disposes of the past, and this enabled her to make several important breaks with orthodox pioneering histories. A pioneer became an agent of change in any time or place—there was no special significance attached to the colonial frontier.

[Pioneering] is a matter firstly of character and secondly of opportunity. A pioneer may be defined as a person who surveys his environment, decides it isn’t good enough, sees what is needed, and gets to work to supply the need. This takes a number of complex qualities, ranging from independence, vision, concentration and selflessness to a ruthless disregard for other people’s corns. So much for character, now for opportunity. I maintain the finest pioneer work being done in Australia to-day is in the capital cities because the cities are offering opportunities the countryside does not.²

In the cities there were all sorts of societies and groups ‘heaving up the flagstones of tradition’. It was collective work, requiring organisation, and the issues included slums, prisons, schools, roads, taxes,

¹ “Building Themselves Up With Aspros”: Pioneer Women Re-assessed’, op. cit., p. 9
unemployment, the maternal death-rate, hospitals, the status of women, free speech, libraries, child welfare, censorship, baby clinics, parks and playgrounds, physical education, opera, and parliamentary expenditure. Who were the pioneers themselves? Here Tennant conceded something to more familiar pioneering histories: 'Hacking away in the undergrowth of resolutions, conferences, deputations and debates, you are most likely to find the lineal descendants of those tough settlers who first decided that the standards of Australia's early black inhabitants were not good enough for them.'

Although Tennant's list of flagstones needing to be heaved up might have embraced almost any politics, The Peaceful Army was in most places an argument for social justice, imagined as a struggle for national progress. The tale of the emancipist Mary Reibey, told by Dymphna Cusack, expresses this egalitarian evolution very clearly. Reibey was one of the founders of the 'gallant tradition that had enabled individuals to wring full and useful lives out of defeat, and the country itself to forge a nation where none had been before'. Tennant's chapter, and indeed the whole book, set out to rescue pioneering from the hackneyed response 'Marvellous old girl'. Linking pioneering with progress enables The Peaceful Army to include accounts of women's writing and painting, feminist struggles, and social reform. It was a shift of meaning which abolished the nostalgia of Vaucluse House and the Pioneers' Ball. Tennant concluded:

Now that I have written this the word pioneer no longer makes me flinch. It has regained its self-respect. No longer has it hoary, snow-white whiskers and a gush of self-conscious hypocrisy. It has a future, it is a young word. I have had to use it so often in this essay that I realise it is the only word for what it means, and it means something large and proud and daring. The battlers keep on battling, and any time that one of them carries through a brilliant piece of work, a new scheme, to-day or fifty years hence, the accolade will still be 'pioneer'.

There are several features of this women's history I want to point out, concentrating on Eleanor Dark's chapter 'Caroline Chisholm and her Times'. Firstly, it was explicitly anti-imperialist and anti-visionary history. Dark makes a general contrast between visionary history and

1 Ibid., p. 132.
2 Ibid., p. 57.
3 Ibid., p. 137.
the kind of history represented by Chisholm, who was, of course, also
the principal figure in Zora Cross's history. Cross regarded Chisholm as
'‘the greatest of all our pioneer women', responsible for 'the true
colonisation' of Australia, whereas Phillip merely 'founded' the
country. Dark proposes that Phillip's historical vision expressed a
distinctively masculine sense of progress, whereas Chisholm's
pioneering was feminine:

The respective attitudes of the average man and the
average woman towards the question of human progress
might be roughly described as the Wide Idealistic and the
Narrow Practical. There is no question of comparing
their merits or their usefulness; each has its own sphere
and function. But it is interesting to notice through the
long story of Caroline Chisholm's work that she never
deviated an inch from the essentially feminine
approach. She was far from incapable of seeing a distant
and tremendous vision, but a glance was all she spared it
from the urgent work that lay beneath her hand. She did
not wait to do things in a large and impressive way—she
was perfectly content to make a small and very humble
beginning.1

Once again, this is national history via the family:

She looked to the completed structure of the nation,
but was content to lay its foundations faithfully, man by
man, woman by woman, child by child, seeing in the
united family the nucleus, the essential life-cell of
progress.2

Although Dark says that 'there is no question' of comparing the merits
of her masculine and feminine views of historical progress, she does
conclude with an assessment of the contemporary implications of these
alternative historical sensibilities. She speaks of the prophecies made
about early New South Wales, observing how frequently people wrote
about future 'greatness'. She quotes several prophecies of this kind,
including Phillip's talk of 'laying the foundations of an Empire'.

Those were the early days of Imperialism; the word
and the idea had a spaciousness and a glamour which are
beginning, now, to be suspect. There are many in these
troubled times who see in it one of the greatest obstacles

1 Ibid., p. 62.
2 Ibid.
to peace, and who feel that war is too high a price to pay for 'glory.' When we ask ourselves, as we must upon a hundred and fiftieth birthday, where we are heading as a nation, the story of Caroline Chisholm seems to point us, not to those dreams of 'empire' which were so freely predicted for us, but to a less spectacular and not unattainable goal, where we might repeat with truth and pride the words spoken by an Irish emigrant nearly a hundred years ago: 'This is a fine, plentiful country—there is no person starving here.'

The word and the idea 'imperialism' would have been quite unknown to Phillip and his contemporaries, since they were not put together until the era of 'finance capital' (as Rudolf Hilferding theorised it) began in the 1890s. Phillip spoke of 'empire', a much more general notion. Dark's mistake provides a clue to some of the sources of her arguments: the writings of Leonard Woolf and others on imperialism which influenced left and liberal circles in Britain and elsewhere between the wars, and had been attacked from a pro-imperial position in Hancock's 1935 *Survey of British Commonwealth Affairs*. The connection between imperialism and war was a constant theme in liberal and marxist analysis from the 1890s to the second world war and beyond. Woolf's particular contribution was to identify virtually the whole history of British imperial expansion with imperialism, a concept previously limited to the aggressive foreign policies, arms races and militarism of the major powers in a much more recent period.

Convict history was another strand in *The Peaceful Army*’s politics. An opening chapter on Elizabeth Macarthur by M.Barnard Eldershaw was balanced with one by Dymphna Cusack on the emancipist Mary Reibey. For her part, and providing a general framework for the other contributors, Dark used the contemporary language of anti-imperialism:

...it seems reasonable to suggest that the main handicap under which the infant colony laboured, the main factor which retarded its growth to nationhood, was not the convict system, but the fact that the real preoccupation of the ‘mother country’ was, not to

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1 The clearest guide to the confused historiography of this subject is Norman Etherington, *Theories of Imperialism: War, Conquest and Capital*, London 1984. Although the word 'imperialism' did have some mid-Victorian currency, Etherington argues convincingly that the influential analyses by Hobson et. al. of 'imperialism' after c. 1895 were not intended to have any historical application: they were critiques of contemporary developments. Leonard Woolf’s books included *Empire and Commerce in Africa* (London 1919), *Economic Imperialism* (London 1920) and *Imperialism and Civilisation* (London 1928).
develop, but to exploit. It was the official attitude, and, all too often, it was the individual attitude....

The convicts, on the other hand, and later on the free settlers who had been driven by pauperism to try their luck in a new land, had every incentive to develop the country. From now on it was their country.¹

It was the country, according to Dark, which changed the character of the convicts. She did not deny that many were vicious on arrival, but, like Greg in Pioneers on Parade, argued that the more important thing was 'what happened to them when, as emancipists, they found themselves free in a country where their decent instincts had a chance to develop.'²

Finally, Dark's history was unusual in that it was able to acknowledge the violence as well as the hardship of the frontier, and more generally the history of Aboriginal resistance to white settlement. She spoke of the 1838 Myall Creek massacre, the sense of innocence among the murderers, and the misguided policies of colonial governments. Anticipating the white historiography of the 1970s, she wrote about continuing, sporadic 'guerilla warfare between blacks and whites'.³

A nomad race finds its country invaded, its streams polluted, its hunting grounds commandeered, cleared, fenced, sown with crops. Its food supply is affected. The white men hunt and kill the kangaroos as a matter of course, but if the hungry blacks kill a sheep for a meal there is the devil to pay.

That the blacks should have occasionally attacked the whites is understandable, excusable, inevitable. That the whites should have defended themselves when attacked is also understandable. Massacre and poisoning are different matters; these, with disease, alcohol and 'civilisation' have come near to exterminating a race to which, too late, we are beginning to give the respect which it deserved.⁴

It seems that once uncoupled from the white frontier, pioneering history was capable of proposing an alternative temporal order for

² Ibid.
³ Ibid., p. 67.
⁴ Ibid., p. 68.
Australian history, where the country was not ‘made’ by clearing and settling, but was something transformed by this process. It therefore had its own history, by no means necessarily subordinate to the history of the pioneers. ‘It was called, constantly, “a new land”, but it was only a new occupation of a very ancient land, a tide of human life, surging recklessly over a land it spared no time to know, or to attempt to know.’ The celebration of anniversaries like 1938 would, of course, make no sense in this alternative history of the land.

The politics of Eleanor Dark’s history would not have been unfamiliar to The Peaceful Army’s readers. Both her concern for the Aborigines and the idea of ‘a very ancient land’ were elements in much forthright descriptive and travel writing on Australia from the mid-1930s on. The idea of pioneering as a struggle for social progress could also be found elsewhere. The argument was made less strongly in the Centenary Gift Book, and Jeanne Young’s 1937 biography of Catherine Helen Spence had described Spence as ‘a “Pioneer Woman” of the world, opening new paths for her sisters to tread’. Nor was this history the only history represented in the book. Vice-regal forewords recapitulated more orthodox pasts: ‘We are celebrating a century and a half of history, which can be summed up in the epic struggle of Australia’s pioneers to tame a continent’ wrote Margaret Wakehurst; ‘I am proud to join in trying to glorify the memory of those gallant and resourceful men and women who “found the way” and slowly but triumphantly conquered the land and bequeathed it to us’ wrote Zara Gowrie.

Even so, it is worth looking into how it was possible for Flora Eldershaw to publish this anti-imperial, anti-heroic, women’s history of the nation. The very considerable distance between her history and Karl Cramp’s suggests that she had considerable editorial control over the book, but the real issue is the general relationship between the Women’s Executive and Advisory Council and the central celebrations administration. Here autonomy is less apparent. I end this chapter with a story which exemplifies this aspect of the politics of pioneering histories: the puzzling story of the Pioneers’ Memorial Garden, built as

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1 Ibid., p. 69.
4 Op. cit., pp. 9, 7. Unfortunately these parts of the book were not included in the 1988 Penguin edition. Their omission was not mentioned or explained.
part of the 1938 celebrations in the Sydney Royal Botanic Gardens, on the margins of Max Kelly's 'street of Triumph and ... street of Tribute'.

A Memorial Garden

It was not strange that such a garden memorialising the pioneers was built. There are gardens dedicated to pioneers all over Australia, and indeed memorials commemorating pioneers in other countries, notably the United States. In Melbourne and Adelaide there are gardens which were also the results of the commemorative celebrations of the 1930s. Those gardens, like some of the American memorials, are dedicated to women pioneers. The women's garden in Melbourne has a curious cross-shaped pool, a bronze female nude in a blue-tiled grotto, and buried documentation on the pioneer women it memorialises.

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1 M.Kelly, *op. cit.*, pp. 27-34.
In the United States in the 1920s, the Daughters of the American Revolution erected memorial statues to pioneer women across the country: large, granite figures of a woman in working clothes, clutching a rifle as well as a child. Although the Sydney garden bears formal similarities with others, it is clearly for both men and women. It is circular, small, sunken, lined and paved with sandstone. There are flower beds, seats, a pool and fountain. There is a central bronze figure—a cupid—and an inscription underneath—'Love led them'. A plaque declares a strained gender indifference: 'Memorial Garden to Pioneers [Men and Women]'.
The representation of women has been a central issue in the whole history of state anniversaries and elaborate public displays. A Women's
Centennial Executive Committee was responsible for the Woman's Pavilion in the 1876 Centennial exhibition at Philadelphia. Events there provide a good example of the difficulties facing women's committees working separately from, but subject to, more powerful bureaucratic units controlled by men. The arrangement seems to be the usual one for events of this kind: the results are always contradictory. In Philadelphia, while the fourth annual conference of the Association for the Advancement of Women discussed the position of professional women in America, the Centennial's organisers named an election day 'Women's Day', explaining that while men would be voting, women would have the exhibition to themselves. Suffragettes demonstrated their opposition to the Centennial and everything associated with it.1

The Sydney pioneers' garden was planned by the Women's Executive Committee, which, as we know, was one wing of the sprawling but tightly controlled Australia's 150th Anniversary Celebrations Council. Members of the Women's Executive were well aware of the problem of being a separate, but not autonomous, part of the organisation. They had their own Advisory Council, a smaller version of the Council to which the Minister and and the other committees reported. Mildred Muscio, chairman of the Women's Executive Committee, was a member of the Executive Committee responsible for the conduct of the whole anniversary. She argued there that women on the women's Executive or the women's Council should be able to participate more in central decision-making: they should be appointed to the Country Committee and the Exhibition Committee, which were both organising events involving women; and they should be permitted to attend meetings of the main Celebrations Council. The chairman promised that 'women will be recognised in every way, and that whenever it is possible to co-opt them for the consideration of matters in which they are interested, it will be done'.2 Lilian Price, General Secretary of the Country Women's Association, asked the Minister in Charge of the Celebrations whether the Government might appoint more women to the Executive. He wrote back:

... I desire to inform you that the plan of organisation was determined by Cabinet only after careful consideration of the schemes adopted by the Victorian and South Australian Governments, respectively, in connection with their Centenary Celebrations and after

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2 Executive Committee minutes, 14th meeting, 11 November 1937, AANSW 9/2442, pp. 3-4.
consideration of reports received from our official representatives abroad respecting the organisation of National Carnivals, Exhibitions and other similar enterprises. In each of these the women had their own Committee and exercised a considerable influence over the final result by handling almost exclusively certain sections of the whole, but they were not represented to any extent in the controlling authority or on the general Committees.

There is practically no likelihood of the scheme of organisation being altered at this late date, but I feel sure that neither I nor any of those working in association with me will hesitate to seek the advice of the Women’s Committee in any matter in which it is thought such assistance would be helpful. In conclusion I wish to pay a most sincere tribute to the excellent work which the Women’s Representative, Mrs. Muscio, is doing as a member of the Executive Committee, but the necessity for the representation of so many sectional interests makes it impossible to provide for an additional representative.¹

There were continuing arguments over decision-making autonomy and funding between the women’s committee and the celebrations executive. The women’s Executive, for example, protested against an instruction that ‘all letters dealing with policy be signed by the General Organising Secretary’. The Executive Committee ‘clarified’ the instruction: it referred to major questions of policy. It was understood that the women’s committee ‘would then conform in the light of this explanation.’² The fact that the women’s committee was able to work at some distance from the main celebrations administration was clearly an advantage in some respects: for example it made possible the publication of the heterodox The Peaceful Army. In a meeting of the Finance Committee, Dunningham said ‘it had been thought better to keep the Women’s Committee to themselves as they seemed to work better that way’.³

The garden was wholly planned by the Women’s Committee. They worked from the precedent provided by the Women’s Committee of the

1 Undated copy, AANSW 9/2451.
2 Executive Committee minutes, 11th meeting, 9 November 1936, AANSW 9/2442, pp. 4-5.
3 Finance Committee minutes, 2nd meeting, 1 November 1936, AANSW 9/2442, p. 1.
Victorian Celebrations Council, which had dedicated a memorial to pioneers as part of Victoria's 1934-5 centenary. The Melbourne garden was a memorial to women pioneers. There was the same intention in Sydney, but the position of the Executive Committee and the Advisory Council was different from those of the women's organisations in earlier celebrations. In South Australia and Victoria, women were able to pay for the memorials with money raised from specific public appeals. In New South Wales the Executive Committee of the Celebrations Council organised a central public appeal for funds, and refused to sanction fund raising by other bodies for particular purposes.1

In this way the Executive Committee directly controlled the entire celebrations budget. This committee allocated a certain sum for the women's garden. It was the bronze cupid, to be made by the distinguished sculptor Paul Montford, which ensured that the garden would cost more than the Advisory Council's first estimate. The women went to the Executive Committee to ask for a further £300. During the discussion of this issue Isabel Fidler, the President of the Country Women's Association, explained that the memorial was no longer to be dedicated to women pioneers only; it was now for men and women pioneers.2 If this change was not made to secure more money for the project, it is odd that it should be first mentioned in the minutes of this committee in the same item as the request for more money.

As for the plaque reading 'Memorial Garden to Pioneers [Men and Women]', it is clear that this was written not by the Women's Advisory Council, but by a senior public servant. In the official papers there is a copy of a memorandum on the subject to the Minister in Charge of Celebrations. The author wrote:

I have re-inserted the words "Men and Women", because upon thinking it over the fact that it is "sponsored by the women" may reasonably infer that it is a memorial to women only, whereas the women's committee is anxious that both men and women be included.3

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1 Executive Committee minutes, 5th meeting, 16 July 1936, p. 2; and 17th meeting, AANSW 9/2442, pp. 4-5.
2 Executive Committee minutes, 19th meeting, 12 April 1937, AANSW 9/2442, p. 5.
3 Unsigned copy, 6 October 1937, AANSW 9/2449
Despite all that anxious reconsideration the Botanic Gardens to this day refers to the garden as a 'Pioneer Women's Garden'. This is not surprising, since the results of the insistence on 'men and women' are confusing. Montford's work was planned for a women's garden, and it refers to a particular kind of women's pioneering history: the story of the woman who left the comforts of civilisation behind her, endured a long and dangerous sea voyage, and then established a home in rough conditions in the bush, all because her husband wanted to go. It was a tale repeated several times in the *Centenary Gift Book*:

The woman, turning slowly away from the door, pensively contemplated the interior of the cottage, comparing it with the lovely English home she had left, perhaps forever. 'John was so eager to make a new life, though,' she reflected, 'and Australia, the land of golden promise, seemed our only hope.' She looked down at her dress of plain grey homespun and smiled half sadly, unconsciously thinking about the costly ball gowns which had been so numerous in her former life. 'Perhaps I will get a new dress in this month's mail,' she soliloquised....

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1 Valerie Downes, 'A Pioneer Woman' in Frances Fraser and Nettie Palmer (eds), *Centenary Gift Book, Op. cit.*, p. 161. The author was a school student. The story won a
The meaning of the sculpture changed with the decision to dedicate the garden to men as well as women. The 'them' in 'Love led them' now included men. Pioneering thus became the expression or result of male as well as female love, and this was as far as I can tell an unconventional idea, and an unintended consequence.

Thus the garden manifests, in a somewhat murky fashion, the sexual currents in pioneering histories. The hints it throws out about a sexual politics can be pursued in pioneering narratives on film and in print. Charles Chauvel's film *Heritage* can be used to briefly elaborate on the sexual politics. Here the original pioneers of the story, husband and wife, were too preoccupied with the job of building their station in the bush to pursue their own romance. This tension is resolved later in the film, when their descendants, a new generation of pioneers, have grown up. This part is set in the 1930s and deals with the love affair of two descendants of pioneers. He is a true pioneer, working hard to establish a cattle run in the Northern Territory. But she is a 'modern woman', who talks of independence and takes flying lessons. She flies up to the Northern Territory and tells him that she will marry him, but doesn't want to live so far away from the city.

He regards this as a challenge to the 'fundamental law between man and woman', which is that 'a woman's life is her husband's life, that his home is her home, no matter where it is'. They break off their engagement. Some time later he goes to Canberra and gives a rousing speech in Parliament supporting imperial free trade. She is in the public gallery and is so moved by his account of the hardships of the pioneers that she agrees to live and work with him in the outback. In this historical narrative, problems in gender relations and the problems of pioneering are resolved together. The family becomes the bearer of history, a link between past and present.

But the garden also points to the more general 'romance' of pioneering, its 'colourful' appeal. Pioneering's 'romantic' attraction was asserted in many places; indeed it is the repetitiveness of such statements which is the most intriguing aspect of them. It was discussed in academic history-writing: S.H. Roberts wrote in his *A History of Australian Land Settlement* that 'as far back as memory goes, nothing has ever gripped me more than the romance of Australia's squatters... I desired to recapture the atmosphere of the time—the struggle and the glamour,'

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prize in a competition arranged by the Association of Head Mistresses of Girls' Secondary Schools.

1 For a detailed analysis of *Heritage*, see Stuart Cunningham, 'Disaggregating Landscape and Nation in Chauvel', in Paul Foss (ed.), *Island in the Stream: Myths of Place in Australian Culture*, Sydney 1988, pp. 70-82.
the camaraderie and the fights against uneven odds, the romance of overlanding and mustering."¹ Ernest Scott, who wrote the introduction to Roberts' book, was less enthusiastic, arguing that in fact Gregory Blaxland had not led his expedition over the Blue Mountains because of 'the sheer romance of the thing'. But he thought that the quest for pasture should 'not seem any less romantic when we understand what the real motives were, than they are when we attribute an entirely fairy-taleish set of reasons for them'.²

In the 1938 references, 'romance' generally names the excitement of the past; it is the essence of popular appeal. It is something the celebrations are supposed to have returned to history. At the opening of the Historical Exhibition on 2 February 1938, the State Minister for Education suggested that

> all the celebrations from the pageant to the exhibition seemed to suggest that in teaching Australian history to the rising generation they seemed somehow to have failed to impart to children the romance of the founding and development of Australia.³

A stronger appreciation of historical romance was, it was said, one result of 1938. Romance was part of a developing 'historical sense' discerned among the people by Karl Cramp.⁴ In the middle of the celebrations, the *Sydney Morning Herald* editorialised that the romance of history was 'coming to be recognised'.

> The Anniversary Celebrations have particularly impressed people with the romance of it all. We may not regard the establishment of a convict settlement, with which Australian settlement began, as a romantic thing, and the bushranging days may be nothing to be proud of. But that, with such an early background, Australia should have grown into the splendid nation that it has become, with its ports and cities comparable to any in the world, in the space of 150 years, is a romance indeed. The real history of this country is written in the lives of the explorers and the pioneering men and women...⁵

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²Ibid., pp. x-xi.
³*Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 February 1938, p. 11. In this report it is not clear to whom 'they' refers.
⁴Ibid., 26 February 1938, p. 10.
⁵Ibid. My epigraph continues this quotation.
There were economic implications, since romantic places appealed to tourists. 'We have been neglectful in one of our most valuable tourist assets'. The value of Australiana was also increasing.

Why this search for rare old books, for early editions, for the pictured scenes of early colonial life as depicted by the artists of a bygone day? To a large extent, no doubt, there is a spirit of commercialism in it; but that very commercialism offers proof of a growing historical sense in the Australian people.¹

The material benefits of historical spectacle were always part of their rationale. The question here is why these statements were being reiterated; why it was thought important to argue for romance. Romance was part of the lexicon used to publicise the celebrations. Like 'colour', it was reported to have attracted audiences to those 'intransitive' pioneering spectacles such as the Vaucluse House pageant which associated national history with the history of elite families. Yet it may also have been all that was attractive about such occasions, since they were intransitive events, dramatising a space of experience which was enclosed by family boundaries.

This is not to argue that there was not considerable interest in such events: the point is that to talk about romance was to emphasise the pleasing details of spectacles, such as costumes and settings, and also, as a necessary consequence, the distance between the pasts such spectacles were meant to invoke and their audiences. A romantic history in this context was one that was not disposable: not transformable, not a useable resource for the future, and thus not a past that could be put aside. In this non-disposable past, the national history of the pioneers was something that had already happened: the Wentworths were 'already citizens of a new world'; according to the Herald 'all this is history. Truly we are living in a new world, and there are new influences at work...'.² The 'historical sense' which the Herald promoted can now be seen as a perception against the arguments developed in The Peaceful Army. Pioneering in the present was not romantic.

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¹ Ibid.
² Ibid.
When the Sydney garden was opened, Lady Gowrie claimed that it would continue to 'speak to us of the past, to remind us of the glorious present, and to promise us ... a still more glorious future.'\(^1\) She observed that 'a growing thing is a fitting memorial to the early pioneers—those gallant people who began the transformation of this continent from a wasteland to a land of plenty'.\(^2\) The garden was made to stand for a conventional kind of pioneering history, the sort of pioneering defined in the *Australian National Dictionary*.

But Gowrie's confidence in the garden's ability to recall the past and promise the future may have been misplaced. Despite the solidity of monuments, their meanings are particularly unstable. 'The monuments are for rent', in William Gass's memorable phrase.\(^3\) They can also become the symbolic equivalents of vacant lots: they can simply lose their significance. When I visited the garden in the course of research there were people there, but office workers eating lunch, not tourists. I was the only person who seemed at all interested in the memorial, until two boys dressed in the uniform of a local private school appeared. One peered into the pool of water surrounding the fountain and sculpture: 'Any money in this one?'

Obviously this present is not the future that was imagined by Lady Gowrie, or, for that matter, by Kylie Tennant. Pioneering history no longer has an 'aura of bravura'; fifty years later, the word 'pioneer' does

\(^1\) *Argus*, 4 February 1938, p. 4.
\(^2\) *Ibid*.
not seem to be much used to describe brilliant innovators. In Canberra, as attendances declined at the annual Pioneers’ Gathering, it was decided to stop holding them. The alternative was to change the definition of pioneer from a person present or living in the area when Lady Denman named Canberra in 1913, to a person living in the district when Parliament was opened in 1927. Such a change would necessarily have included ‘the flood of Public Service Pioneers’.1

Pioneering histories may no longer point the way to national fulfilment and social justice. They continue to be reproduced and recirculated. The general editor of Frontier Country: Australia’s Outback Heritage (two volumes, 1989) explains:

> Almost from the beginning of European civilisation in Australia, the newcomers were intrigued by the land beyond the tiny pockets of coastal settlement they had established. At first fearfully, and with ever-increasing confidence, they sought out, traversed, mapped and recorded the ‘outback’. They moved sheep and cattle into the frontier country, built homes and established the pastoral industries that have remained vital to Australia’s wealth.

> Their lives are the stuff of legend and today, even though Australians are a predominantly urban race, the outback is firmly embedded in the national consciousness. For many it is the ‘real Australia’, that part of the country that makes the continent and its people different from any other.2

How close this passage is to the prevailing ideas of the thirties. Fifty years ago Hartley Grattan complained about Australians’ eagerness to call themselves a ‘race’;3 yet there is still an audience for the idea. Of course the outback is important in the national mythology, but its strongest resonances are of recent histories, including—for example—the story of Azaria Chamberlain, the tourism boom, the aftermath of British atomic weapons testing, and the protracted struggles over land rights, uranium mining and American military installations. To speak of the outback now in the terms of 1930s pioneering narratives is not only to imagine a historical colonisation which we know was never so

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1 Canberra and District Historical Society Newsletter, April/May 1989, pp. 3-5.
simple;¹ it is to install the present somewhere in that past past, as if the complex recent history had not happened.

No clear line can be drawn between the historical field of the thirties and that of the present. ‘Frontier country’ exists in the landscape of sacred sites. On Australia Day 1990 the Governor-General broadcast his view that

if Australia is to successfully meet the challenges ahead of us in this next century [the third of European settlement], it seems to me vital that we draw on those strengths that are already there ... that we reassert into the future, the pioneering traditions we have inherited from the past.

This is a vast and diverse country ... rich in history and landscape and culture ... forty thousand years of Aboriginal culture with much to teach us about understanding the land and our sense of place, if only we will let it.²

‘Pioneering qualities’ for Hayden are resilience, the ability to learn from past mistakes, mateship, basic decency and a fair go.³ He does not entertain the possibility that the lessons of Aboriginal culture might not be consistent with pioneering traditions. The qualities he names are, in Australian culture, old fashioned ones, evoking a fuzzy past, as does the idea of ‘labour tradition’ to which politicians also appeal. Perhaps Hayden’s references to pioneering enable him to locate himself in the national past, and to address the present from that position. Such a perspective may be the most appropriate for a person whose office signifies a colonial history which has continued into the present.

Visionary history, the history of the future, has also continued into the present, but its force is much diminished. On the eve of the 1988 bicentenary the Australian Law News published an updated prophecy for Arthur Phillip, in the form of a letter to Lord Sydney. It is worth quoting as the most liberal rewriting of the text:

² Address by His Excellency the Honourable Bill Hayden Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia on the Occasion of Australia Day, 26 January 1990, pp. 4-5. Suspension marks in the original.
³ Ibid., p. 3.
...Last night I dreamed of the great southern continent for which we are bound.

In my dream I saw our eleven ships enter the bay where the botanical specimens so impressed Banks and Cook. For only the second time in the long history of this land, startled birds flew up as the clatter of anchor chains shattered the silence.

In my dream I saw other, giant birds swoop low over the bay, and heard a sound like thunder.

I recalled what Cook wrote of the inhabitants whose possession of the land I was about to challenge after 40,000 years: ‘They may appear to some,’ he said, ‘to be the most wretched people on earth. But in reality they are far happier than we Europeans. They sleep as sound in a small hovel, or even in the open, as the King in his palace on a bed of down.’

Yet in my dream I saw stretching down the years a tragic, unending conflict between cultures that would test the wit of all who tried to resolve it.

I took the fleet north to the harbour Cook called Port Jackson. Here in my dream I saw the beginnings of the new colony. I saw the village grow into a town, and into a city that carried your name.

I saw a great arch in the sky joining the shores of the blue harbour. I saw a great ship, its white sails motionless as if carved from stone. I saw, in my dream, men in black gowns, with the lawyer’s wig on their heads, hurrying along a street. The street bore my name.

I saw a man strike his shovel on a rock that gleamed with gold.... I saw ninety thousand white crosses on beaches and deserts, in jungles and fields, and shimmering in skies and oceans.

I saw new colonies grow, and dispute among themselves. I saw the workers join hands against oppressive authority, against harsh employers, against workers from other lands. I saw the land shut its doors to all whose skin was not white.
Political parties began. Colonial assemblies were elected. A desire for nationhood stirred, and a great commonwealth was born. ...

And as my dream neared its end, I looked down the broad avenues of a capital city. Across a sparkling lake I saw a building of white—the symbol of colonial disunity—and beyond, rising on a hill, a great new edifice to the nation’s maturity and pride.

I saw—two hundred years down the highway of a nation’s history—a people preparing to celebrate their nationhood, to consider their mistakes, to remember their successes, to recognise their achievements, to resolve, together, to go forward into their third century with purpose and determination...¹

This 1988 Phillip stands not for empire but, playfully, for an indigenous political consensus. The subject of celebration is ‘nationhood’; history reveals ‘mistakes’ as well as ‘achievements’. Phillip foresees dispossession and racism.

What is unusual about this version of Phillip in 1988 is not the content of his vision—which neatly exemplifies a wider awareness of Aboriginal criticisms of the bicentenary, and a concomitant desire to acknowledge the violence of white settlement and the survival of Aborigines—but the fact that it is put into Phillip’s mouth at all. Since the thirties, Australia has all but disposed of its imperial links, although the reserve powers of the Crown were again at the centre of national politics in the crisis of 1975 and its aftermath. Neither Phillip nor any other historical individual was singled out for celebration in the official bicentenary programme. Although royal visitors were enthusiastically received No re-enactment of 1788 was officially planned.

The ‘Celebration of a Nation’ was a year-long, nation-wide programme in which 26 January was merely one particularly spectacular element. The bicentenary was designed to appeal to a diverse and dispersed population, and it was supposed to enable the participation of that population, in thousands of small and large events.² In its earlier planning, the theme ‘Living Together’ was proposed, and the anniversary was seen as a vehicle for reflection on the relationships

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² For a chronology of bicentennial (and other) activities, see Kim Anderson (ed.), *Australians 1988*, Willoughby 1989.
between Australians, including the relations between blacks and whites. The impression of facile unity was to be avoided. That proposed programme seems extraordinarily pluralistic and liberal in comparison with the one organised fifty years earlier. Those that followed it were less pluralistic, although 'participation' and 'diversity' remained important objectives. Diversity also characterised unofficial popular histories produced for the bicentenary. In his excellent survey of those histories, Chris Healy has remarked that

under the impact of dialogue and debate, under the impact of popular memory and media images..., a unified past collapses into a multitude of competing stories. The ways in which people inhabit the popular histories are similarly ambivalent and contested. Alongside traditional hero figures there is a range of social subjects clamouring for admittance, almost demanding historical recognition within the boundaries of populist social history.¹

Healy is right to stress the level of argument over history in 1988. The subject of visionary history, the history of Phillip, had a prominent place in those arguments.

Both before and during 1988 the bicentenary was the subject of conservative pressure for a greater acknowledgement of Australia's 'British heritage' and national unity.² There is no sharper point of difference between the 1938 and the 1988 anniversaries than their handling of the First Fleet. One of those who wanted a stronger celebration of imperial history in 1988 was Jonathan King, a descendant of a First Fleet officer and New South Wales governor. King vigorously promoted a full-scale re-enactment of Phillip's First Fleet, and carried the project through with private and, in the end, considerable public support. But he did not have the support of the Commonwealth government agency which was principally responsible for the bicentenary. The Australian Bicentennial Authority was reluctant to fund an expensive spectacle which had little to do with its own agenda. After a series of financial disasters, the Fleet entered Sydney Harbour on 26 January, where huge crowds had gathered around the foreshore. It was also met by a large demonstration of Aborigines and white supporters, who protested against the celebration of an invasion. But a

¹ 'History, History Everywhere, but...', Loc. cit., p. 191.
direct confrontation was avoided: there was to be no re-enactment of Phillip's landing. King was unable to present his interpretation of Phillip's vision, although he has provided this in his book *The Battle for the Bicentenary*, where he has Phillip saying

> We have founded here a State which we hope will not only occupy and rule this great country, but will also become a shining light amongst all the nations of the Southern Hemisphere. How grand is the prospect that lies before this youthful nation.¹

‘Phillip struck me as a man of incredible vision’, King writes, ‘—a great example to modern Australians’. He lists the obstacles in Phillip’s way: ‘towering gum trees, rocks, resentful convicts, disgruntled marines with less than two years of food supplies, and Aboriginals ready to defend their territory’. His treatment of Phillip evinces little more accommodation of Aboriginal history than Cramp’s 1938 speech. It actually emphasizes dispossession. Such a history was not warrantable in 1988, when political debate was focussed on the much more challenging questions of justice that arose from Aboriginal deaths in custody and the Aboriginal campaign for a treaty with white Australia. Phillip could not be presented, by King or anyone, as having such a contentious national history at his disposition.

And what of pioneering history, the form of heroic history more associated with nation than empire? One sophisticated interpretation of pioneering history was promoted as ‘a major bicentennial event’ during 1988. This was the ten hour television mini-series *The Dirtwater Dynasty*, a highly melodramatic epic produced by the successful Australian company Kennedy Miller. *Dirtwater Dynasty* traces the life of an English immigrant who arrives in New South Wales at the turn of the century. It begins with a long, low moving aerial shot of the outback, showing dramatic sandstone outcrops and dry, bare hills. A gruff, old Australian man’s voice is heard, saying slowly:

> This is the land of my childhood. The oldest land on earth... a place of endless summers and soaring skies. This is Australia... the outback. A harsh and unforgiving land. I can look back now over the track of eighty years and still remember what it was like, standing on the edge of a new frontier. Nature seemed much grander then; the stars were closer, the sun was hotter, the rivers wider... And in my mind’s eye I can see all of us, moving

through this giant landscape like a strange nomadic tribe....

Dissolve to a bush cemetery

We were the drovers, the prospectors, the squatters and shearsers... we were bushmen, simple men, the shape of our lives hammered out by drought and fire. All except one.

Shot of old man's face

From out of nowhere he built an empire. And yet, like any man who tries to write his will across the sky, he paid the price.... In that last fading year he would have traded it all... traded it all, just to hold his daughter in his hands...

The scene is set for a heroic tale of empire-building. The story begins in industrial England, where Richard, a wandering orphan, finds a job in a coal mine and is taken in by a local family, the Eastwicks. But a mine accident destroys the family, and Richard, captivated by images of rural prosperity, leaves for Australia. In Sydney he falls in love with Kate McBride, the daughter of an angry and obsessive Methodist Minister. Richard heads west, and finds himself in drought-struck sheep country near Broken Hill. He meets Josh McCall, the man who is speaking at the beginning, becomes a drover, stumbles upon a deserted, waterless station, and witnesses the brutal treatment of the Aborigines by a powerful neighbour.

But Richard is lucky and determined. He marries Kate and with Josh's help stocks his land, gambling on the possibility of bore water. He and Kate have a son, David. When water is found, nothing stands in his way. He makes a fortune. His objects are then to expand his empire and hand it down to his family. But Kate dies having her second child and David is killed at Gallipoli. Richard himself develops tuberculosis. He recovers and marries again, and has twins, David and Ritchie, with his new wife Frances. Richard is a domineering father. He holds his dead son David up to the young boys as a hero, a model of manliness. The twins must learn to ride and swim as David did. One, the younger David, does so, while Ritchie escapes as soon as he can. They both go to war in 1939: David dies in North Africa; Ritchie survives the Burma railway. While Richard pursues his business, the family crumbles. But he manages to reconcile his son and his wife to bush life, and soon a grandson appears. Inevitably, disaster strikes: both Ritchie—who never
did learn to swim—and grandson drown in the Dirtwater. With no-one to inherit his life’s work, Richard’s world collapses.

What are we to make of such heightened melodrama? In my view it should be taken seriously as a clever re-working of pioneering history. Like Kennedy Miller’s other historical mini-series—among them Vietnam, The Cowra Breakout, Bodyline, and Shout!—The Dirtwater Dynasty is acutely aware of the cultural resonances of its own narrative form and devices. It makes reference to a series of established Australian bush motifs. The opening scene, for example, rapidly introduces the ‘lost child’, a favourite theme of older bush writing and painting. Later in the series Streeton’s ‘The Purple Noon’s Transcendent Might’ becomes an important image for Richard. The Dirtwater Dynasty goes to some trouble to locate its characters and narrative within a culture, ‘quoting’ frequently from newsreel and feature film, newspapers, radio news and drama, music and dance, as well as landscape painting. There are also stylistic references. The aerial shot of the outback with the voice-over recalls the beginning of Chauvel’s Jedda. So do the words ‘This is Australia....’ A recent study discusses what Chauvel’s ‘locationism’: the director’s desire to make ‘Australia a film star’.1 Chauvel is used again later, when a scene from Forty Thousand Horsemen appears.

All this is not to serve the purpose of nostalgia. Stuart Cunningham has pointed to the differences in how history is used by mini-series such as The Dirtwater Dynasty, and by Australian period feature films, of which there were many in the 1970s.2 Whereas those period films tended to place history in the background of their subjects lives (Picnic at Hanging Rock, for example), mini-series often deal directly with well-known historical, themes, figures and events (consider Shout! or The Dismissal). In The Dirtwater Dynasty, pioneering does not provide a back-drop for drama: it is the subject of drama.

In this respect it is indeed closer to Chauvel’s work than to more recent Australian cinema. If a reference point for The Dirtwater Dynasty’s excessive melodrama is needed, Chauvel provides it in such pioneering epics as Heritage. Heritage is a recklessly ambitious film: it attempts to encompass a hundred years of Australian history, to harmonise fundamental sexual conflicts, and to finally portray a utopian fulfillment of individual, familial and national ambition. This form of

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high melodrama breaks down precisely because it tries to say so much: the film's content places its form under enormous pressure. A plausible, coherent narrative becomes impossible.¹

The Dirtwater Dynasty is an encompassing melodrama which has much in common with Heritage: It deals with major events in Australian history; it canvasses racial and sexual conflicts; and it examines the way issues of inheritance affect the relationships between a pioneering patriarch and his family. It is also always excessive, as Heritage is. There are too many deaths, too many illnesses, too many dire family tragedies. Unlike Heritage, however, The Dirtwater Dynasty is well aware of its own excesses. It delights in its ludicrous concatenation of catastrophes. It does not attempt to resolve the conflicts it refers to, and it does not seek to fulfill the ambitions which drive its story along.

To turn back to the story: Richard Eastwick believes he has no surviving descendants when his son and grandson drown in the water that made his fortune. This is not the case: he does not know that Kate's second child, Nancy, survived and has been brought up by her grandparents, the Minister and his wife. The Reverend McBride saw Nancy as a gift from God, a replacement for the daughter he lost to an ungodly man. But Nancy runs away with a travelling salesman, a jazz musician named Guy Westaway. They settle in Sydney, and Nancy has a son, Michael. Guy nurses his jazz ambitions, working as a cinema musician, until he loses his job in the Depression. When Nancy falls pregnant again Guy tries to persuade her to have an abortion. She refuses; Guy leaves her to look for work in the bush. The baby is still-born.

In considerable poverty, and oblivious of her real family, Nancy rears Michael alone, while Guy is 'on the wallaby' for almost a decade. He returns to her on the eve of the second world war, and when Michael enlists he does so as well, believing he will look after his son at war, and make up for his earlier neglect. Guy once more leaves Nancy pregnant. Both he and Michael are killed. While her father is desperately wishing for an heir, Nancy is once more looking after a baby, Sarah, on her own. She is poor and ill, and finally diagnosed as suffering from Parkinson's disease. Knowing that she will soon be unable to care for Sarah, she has her daughter adopted.

Richard, however, eventually finds out that Nancy is alive. By the time he traces her to a nursing home, Nancy's degeneration has progressed

¹ For a discussion of this 'high melodramatic mode', see Featuring Australia, op. cit., pp. 24-7. For the heedless ambition of Heritage, see Elsa Chauvel, My Life with Charles Chauvel, Sydney 1973, pp. 58-62.
too far: she can no longer talk or understand what Richard says. Richard is told that she has no children. He revises his will, deciding to divide his huge property holdings among Ritchie's widow, the lover of his long dead first son, Josh McCall and the Aborigines. His lawyer objects, to no avail: 'You've built a giant corporate structure. You're dividing it up. You're leaving it to strangers: women, blacks, old men.... If you'll be advised, a foundation, a trust fund...'.

But by then Sarah herself is a young woman, looking for her real mother. She visits Nancy after Richard, and the stage is set for a meeting between the patriarch and the child he did not know existed. The problem is that she is a nun: she cannot inherit because she has taken a vow of poverty, and she cannot continue the Eastwick family line because she is celibate. On Richard's deathbed, *The Dirtwater Dynasty* ends with Richard, Sarah and Josh laughing. If inheritance is impossible, so is the pioneering dream. The pioneer cannot dispose of the past when he can foresee no pioneers in the future. Richard's empire will die with him.

Chris Healy has described the field of history in 1988: falling in uncertain times, the anniversary 'opened the past to a range of demands and questions'. There were no agreed upon ways of understanding the past: 'no primary sense of loss, no overwhelming nostalgia, no consistent romanticism, no acceptable closure of memory, no fixed truth value'.\(^1\) *The Dirtwater Dynasty* responded to those demands. In the first place, as a work of television history, it views its material from a series of perspectives, including that of Josh McCall, who is nostalgic, and always distanced and sometimes very critical of Richard's actions; that of Richard himself, who is focussed on the prospects for high achievement and long-term ambition; and that of Nancy, removed from the family and caught up in desperately immediate economic and domestic crises.

Each of these viewpoints serves to qualify and complicate our attitude to the others. Josh's modesty attractively foils Richard's arrogance, for example, and his commitment to giving others 'a fair go' compares favourably with Richard's ruthless dealings. Yet we know that the transformation of the bush which Richard promotes is more attuned to technological and economic possibilities than Josh imagines. Nancy's outlook reminds us of the irrelevance of both to ordinary urban life. The series thus satisfies Robert A. Rosenstone's call for a film history which comes to terms with a world 'deluged with images'. He asserts the need for film histories which do not 'deny historical alternatives' by

\(^1\)Loc. cit., p. 192.
'Leaving it to Strangers'

compressing ‘the past to a closed world by telling a single, linear story with, essentially, a single interpretation’.¹

Secondly, *The Dirtwater Dynasty* is more than an exercise in Nietzschean ‘critical history’: it does much more than attack ‘monumental history’ from the point of view of the present. Graeme Davison has pointed out that critical history’s condemnation, or radical rejection, of the past can do little more than intensify moral indignation.² Rather than rejecting history, *The Dirtwater Dynasty* shows that some attitudes towards it are difficult to sustain. It is an infusion of the critical with the antiquarian, not unlike Davison’s own example of the pioneer museum which exhibits a Chinese camp. Despite melodrama and comic bathos, it insists on the seriousness of its subject. It insists on the continuities between the past it depicts and the present, and the relevance of that past for the present. The relevance does not lie in a renewal of pioneering, but in an examination of the idea of pioneering. *The Dirtwater Dynasty* asserts that heroic history is a story that matters.

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¹ ‘History in Images/History in Words’, Loc. cit., p. 1174. The device of using a number of perspectives is a hallmark of the Kennedy Miller style. See Stuart Cunningham’s comments on *Vietnam* in particular, Loc. cit., p. 36.

² Loc. cit., p. 74.
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