



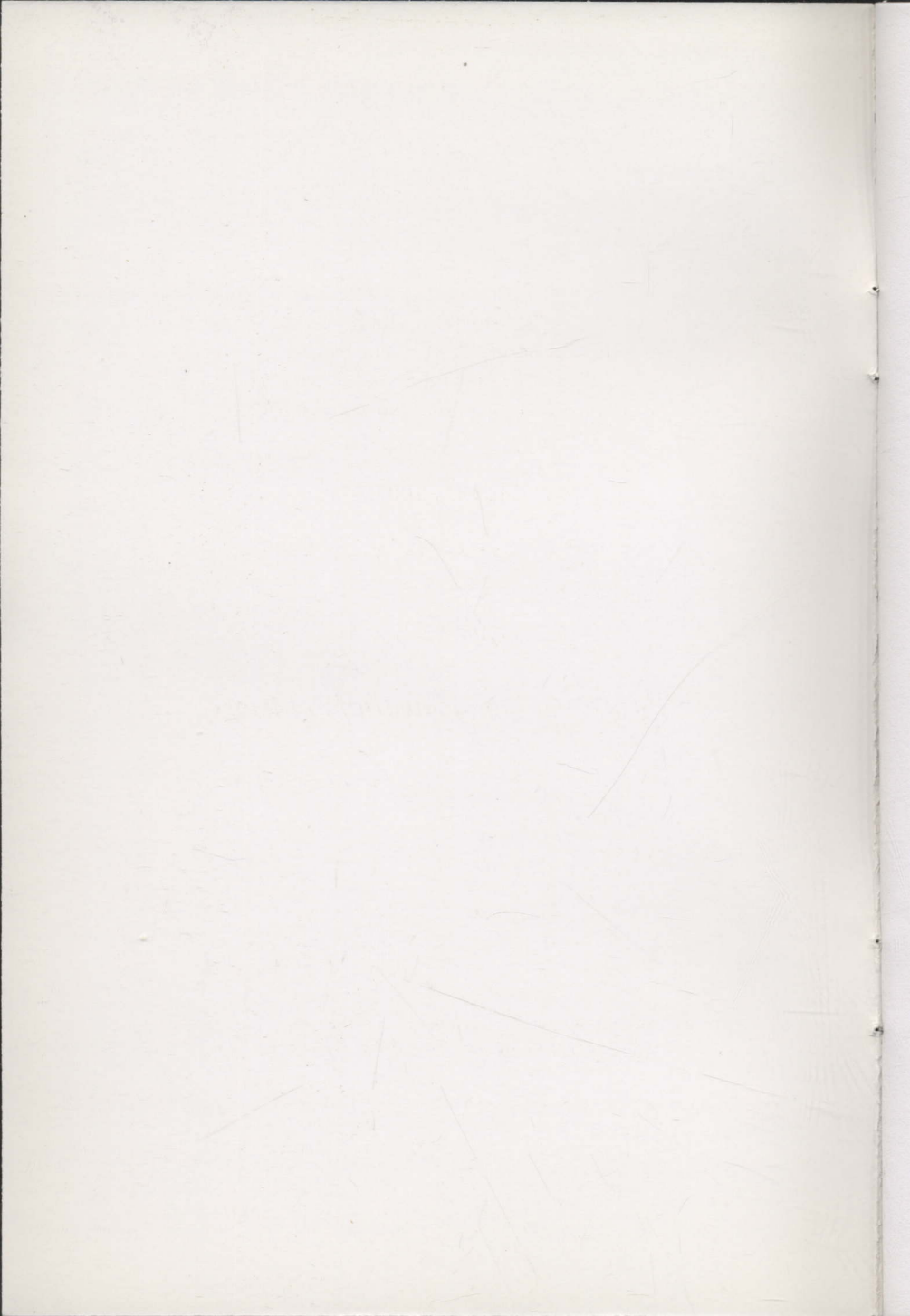
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THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY

The Allan Martin Lecture 2007

Ken Inglis

*Speechmaking in Australia
history*



The Allan Martin Lecture
2007

History Program
Research School of Social Sciences
College of Arts and Social Sciences
The Australian National University

15 May 2007

Ken Inglis

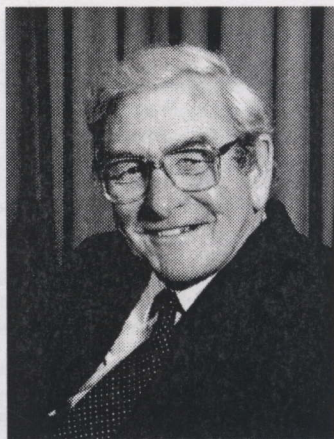
Speechmaking in Australian history

History Program, Research School of Social Sciences
THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY

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Allan William Martin 1993

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The Allan Martin Lecture

History Program
Research School of Social Sciences
The Australian National University

The Inaugural Allan Martin Lecture was delivered by Dr Inga Clendinnen in the Coombs Lecture Theatre, The Australian National University on 4 May 2004. It was the first of an annual series to honour the late A.W. Martin (1926-2002). The lecture series will bring a distinguished scholar whose work is relevant to Allan's intellectual, institutional and social interests to the History Program, Research School of Social Sciences, The Australian National University for at least a week to give a public lecture and one or two seminars of a more specialized kind, and to be available to staff, graduate students and other scholars in the Canberra area to discuss current intellectual developments. The History Program might, from time to time, combine the Annual Lecture with a small conference to which people from beyond Canberra might be invited. The Lecture will take place in April or May each year.

The Lecturer will be selected by a committee comprising the Head of the History Program, Research School of Social Sciences, a postgraduate student of the History program, and a former staff member or student. In choosing the Annual Lecturer, the committee will attempt to balance national and international scholars and scholars at different stages of their careers.

The Lecture will be an occasion for a reunion of current and former staff, students, and visitors of the History Program.

The Lecture will be associated with a brief summary of the scope of Allan's historical interests and activities to illuminate his professional activity over a period of fifty years.

Allan William Martin 1926-2002

Allan Martin was an intellectual, institutional and social pioneer whose career as a historian spanned the second half of the twentieth century. When most Australians went to England for their postdoctoral work, he chose the fledgling Australian National University, where he was the first doctoral student in History in the Research School of Social Sciences, graduating in 1955. When few historians wrote about Australia, his thesis focused on nineteenth-century New South Wales politics; and he insisted on the importance of cross-disciplinary work when this was unfashionable. His first major book, *Parliament Factions and Parties: The First Thirty Years of Responsible Government in New South Wales* (1966), was written with his longtime friend and collaborator, the political scientist Peter Loveday; and he edited *The Emergence of the Australian Party System* (1977) with Loveday and political scientist Robert Parker.

After serving his apprenticeship at the University of New South Wales, the University of Melbourne and the University of Adelaide, Allan Martin accepted the Foundation Chair in History at La Trobe University in 1966, at the same time as his wife Jean Martin became Foundation Chair in Sociology. The department he established at La Trobe was distinguished by its global reach, establishing strong programs in North and South American History as well as the more usual British and Australian fields. He and Jean Martin again moved together when he returned to the Research School of Social Sciences as a Senior Fellow in 1973 and Jean took up a position as Professor of Sociology. After Jean's death in 1979, Allan married Beryl Rawson, a distinguished Professor of Classics, providing once again a model of intellectual partnership to younger scholars.

Allan Martin became fascinated by the individuals who created and changed the political system, and his work increasingly became biographical. Beginning with the article, 'William McMillan: A Merchant in Politics' (1955), Allan subsequently wrote about two major lives of Australian politicians, *Henry Parkes: A Biography* (1980) and *Robert Menzies: A Life*, 2 vols (1993, 1999). He provided biographical material for the use of the profession in *Members of the Legislative Assembly of New South Wales* (1959) and a number of entries in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* and *Dictionary of National Biography*, and his *Letters from Menie: Sir Henry Parkes and His Daughter* (1983) made those valuable social documents more widely available. He came as close as he ever would to autobiography in his article on 'The Country' in *Australians from 1939* (1987).

Allan Martin was an innovative teacher whose most influential work was often in graduate and honours seminars. His only article on teaching, in *Teaching History*, is still much sought after. He reflected on his experience at La Trobe in an edited volume on *Universities Facing the Future* (1972) and contributed a chapter on Menzies and the Murray Committee to *Ideas for Histories of Universities in Australia* (1990), edited by F.B. Smith and P. Crichton.

Speechmaking in Australian History

Men and Women of Australia!

I begin with those words not because I have delusions of grandeur but to quote the title of a recent selection of speeches in Australian history: *'Men and Women of Australia.'* *Our Greatest Modern Speeches*. The same words begin one of the five speeches by Gough Whitlam included in the selection. That one, delivered on the eve of Whitlam's victory in 1972, appears in the book under the heading 'It's time'. The editor, Michael Fullilove, quotes the person who actually wrote the speech, Graham Freudenberg, saying that it was at least five years in the making, representing a distillation of Mr Whitlam's program as it developed over the course of his leadership. 'This process itself', the editor writes, 'took place largely through the writing and giving of speeches'.

That salutation, as the editor notes, connected Gough Whitlam with his party's revered predecessor John Curtin, who had used it in wartime speeches as prime minister. The editor doesn't say, though thanks to Allan Martin we know, that earlier in the war another prime minister, R.G. Menzies, had also addressed the nation as Men and Women of Australia. Not that Michael Fullilove lacks appreciation of Menzies as orator. By the test of numbers, indeed, he regards Menzies as the greatest, selecting no less than seven of his speeches, among them one in a series of talks Menzies gave on commercial radio in 1942, when he was out of office, entitled 'The Forgotten People' – talks whose historic importance was comparable with that one of Whitlam's thirty years later. Fullilove quotes Allan judging this speech as 'Menzies at his best: presenting simple, arresting ideas in elegant, ardent language'.

The two principal subjects of Allan's writing were both orators. The earlier one, Henry Parkes, would never have thought of saying 'Men and women of Australia': he was addressing men only, since women didn't have the vote in his lifetime; and he didn't address the whole nation at once, as Curtin did by radio and Menzies and Whitlam by radio and television. Parkes spoke mainly to audiences in New South Wales, though towards the end of his life he became one of our first intercolonial orators, giving addresses which helped to make the coming nation. In 1890, at a conference in Melbourne on federation, replying to the toast, 'A United Australasia', Parkes coined, as Allan puts it, the great saying of the occasion: 'The

crimson thread of kinship runs through us all'. That speech was as historic as Menzies' *Forgotten People* or Whitlam's *It's Time*.

For Parkes, writes Allan, 'speaking was the wine of life'. We meet him as a youth thrilled by the orators of the Birmingham Political Union and listening to the sermons of a famously thunderous preacher in one of Birmingham's Congregational chapels. We are there when the young immigrant makes his first public speech, to Sydney's Constitutional Association in 1849, and when he addresses later that year the Great Protest Meeting (a title deriving from the rhetoric of Birmingham radicalism) to demand 'No More Convicts'. We are there in Hyde Park at his nomination for parliament in 1856, when he addresses a rain-drenched crowd from the hustings, in days before that word had subsided into a metaphor: the hustings was a platform, erected for the occasion. We are there over the next thirty years and more for speeches in and out of parliament. We read what Allan counts as the most insightful pen-portrait we have of the Grand Old Man, by another celebrated orator, Alfred Deakin:

His huge figure, slow step, deliberate glance and carefully brushed-out aureole of white hair ... His voice ... pleasant and capable of reaching and controlling a large audience. He was fluent but not voluble, his pauses skilfully varied, and in times of excitement he employed a whole gamut of tones ranging from a shrill falsetto to deep resounding chest notes. He had always in his mind's eye his own portrait as that of a great man, and constantly adjusted himself to it.

Deakin goes on:

It was always a problem with Parkes as with Disraeli where the actor posturizer and would-be sphinx ended or where the actual man underneath began.

The actual man underneath. Inga Clendinnen picked up those words for the title of her inaugural Allan Martin lecture. Deakin discerns in the Parkes of 1890 'a vast and inexpressible weariness'. Allan, concerned as always to connect the public figure with the actual man underneath, tells us that the old man's weariness was not pretended. He was weary at this time, and very ill. But he still had five years of life, work, fame and speechmaking to go.

Menzies' *'Forgotten People'* come almost at the end of Allan's first volume on its maker. As he embarked on the second volume, Allan paused to give a speech of his own on the subject of Menzies' oratory, in one of an annual series of lectures honouring Sir Robert Menzies. He reminds us that the young Menzies, like the young

Parkes, was exposed to preaching: the lay preaching of his father James in Jeparit. But the father's rhetoric, both in church and in secular activities – sporting, cultural, political – was no model for the son's. Far from it. Allan quotes tellingly:

When my father was in full spate at some meeting, and drew tears from his audience, I am ashamed to say that I used to shrink back in my seat and say to myself, "I wish Father wouldn't do that!" ... in my own later public and political life, I distrusted emotion.

The young Menzies first spoke in parliament – the Victorian Parliament – in 1928, bringing to politics a formidable and not altogether attractive reputation as a barrister. We have only tantalising glimpses of his performance at the bar. 'A great cross-examiner', writes Oliver MacDonagh of Daniel O'Connell, 'is a sculptor carving in snow; only on the rare occasions is he extensively reported'. Allan quotes a friend and colleague of Menzies, Percy Joske, saying that at the bar he 'employed his cutting tongue without hesitation'. He goes on:

As he always spoke with great authority and was readily quoted, his talk could and did cause harm to the unfortunate at whom it was aimed.

Menzies had a lot to unlearn on his journey from the courts to federal parliament and the Prime Minister's Lodge, and one thing to learn: how to soften and warm his rhetoric, to let some emotion through.

When Menzies sees and hears the champions performing in the Mother of Parliaments, on journeys to the heart of empire in 1935, 1938 and 1941, what he learns from them is not how to improve his own oratorical skills but to feel pleased with them. Like Nellie Mitchell in 1886 on her way to becoming Dame Nellie, like Alfred Deakin at Colonial Conferences in London in 1887 and 1897, like the Australian cricketers at the Oval in 1882, he realises that he is as good as metropolitan Britons at what he does. In 1935, at a meeting of the Empire Parliamentary Association, he speaks after the Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin, in Westminster Hall:

possibly the first Dominion Minister, (he tells his diary), ever to speak in this historic spot. ... I think of Mother and Father listening in 12,000 miles away and trust not to dishonour them and get to my feet, and *mirabile dictu*, get away with it. ... Tonight, at the Imperial Institute, I am quite excited to find my speech, so to speak, the talk of the room.

Menzies goes on to taste defeat, victory, unparalleled longevity in office. He wishes television had never arrived, but he uses it more skilfully in the 1960s than his

opponent Arthur Calwell. His speech in 1948 opposing the Chifley government's bill to nationalise banking was a turning point on his road back to the Lodge. 'I could never become emotional by design', Allan quotes, 'but every now and then ... a strong feeling will leap into your heart and mind, and then it happens.' It happened as he rose to denounce what in his opening remarks he described as 'the most far-reaching, revolutionary, unwarranted and un-Australian measure introduced in the history of this Parliament'.

The pattern evident in this speech, Allan observes, elements of emotion, particularly at the beginning and the end, with careful reasoning in between – appears often enough in other major speeches on matters about which Menzies cared deeply, like the threat he believed he saw in Communism, the sanctity of contract as the basis of a stable society, respect for the British monarchy and British institutions as the core of Australian government and freedom.

Among people well placed to judge the mature Menzies as a speaker Allan quotes the senior public servant Frederick Shedden, who wrote:

His crystal-clear mind and beautiful English explain difficult things that worry the ordinary citizen, in such a manner that he [the citizen] feels they are the very things he has been feeling but unable to express himself.

Other close observers saw flaws and deficiencies. No originality, said the shrewd journalist Alan Reid. Menzies took a rather condescending view of his antagonist John Curtin, but a journalist who saw and heard Curtin speak in parliament just after the battle of the Coral Sea in May 1942 wrote: 'No one who participated in the few minutes in which Mr Curtin was addressing the House failed to come out of them a better Australian'. I doubt whether anybody said that about a speech by Menzies. Billy Hughes believed that Menzies lacked the power to move great crowds or bodies of troops. (Unlike himself, he implied, the man who basked in the nickname the Little Digger.) But, said Hughes, who never praised lightly, and who had cause for hostility to Menzies

when it comes to Parliament I truly consider that Menzies is not only the best debater I have ever heard, but in my judgment the greatest who ever lived. And I have read Burke, Cicero, Randolph, Churchill, Pitt and Fox.

Nobody ever compared Henry Parkes with Cicero, or Demosthenes, or any other classical orator. The journalist who edited a book of his speeches in 1876 – the first book of anybody's speeches, I think, to be published in Australia – described

Parkes' style as 'unadorned eloquence'. The editor noted that this had been Sir Robert Peel's term for the speech of Richard Cobden, whose name Parkes conferred on his own youngest son, Cobden Parkes. Richard Cobden was Henry Parkes' model for both style and substance, for that unadorned eloquence, and for articulating the doctrine of free trade which became Parkes' guiding principle in politics.

One man who shared the platform with Parkes at the Great Protest Meeting of 1849 spoke with a more adorned eloquence. This was the Reverend Dr John Dunmore Lang, of whom an admirer said in 1850 that he 'felt inadequate to describe the Doctor's virtues and abilities; he doubted whether Demosthenes, Cicero or any of the other great orators of antiquity could do so'. This tribute was offered by the chairman at a dinner in Lang's honour. Speakers on such occasions are not on oath. But it reminds us that until lately the oratory of classical antiquity had some influence on our forensic and political public speech, partly by design, partly by osmosis. Perhaps Gough Whitlam is the last public speaker in Australia familiar with the example and precept of Demosthenes and Cicero.

Lang's first political speech, delivered to an audience in Melbourne in 1842, lasted nearly four hours. How could he sustain his adorned eloquence for so long? How did the audience, and other nineteenth century audiences, endure oratory of such length? If I pursue that puzzle I'll be in danger of going beyond the sadly limited time that the 21st century allows. But even in the 19th century, Mark Twain observed that few sinners are saved after the first twenty minutes of a sermon.

Brevity is not among the qualities enjoined by those Greek and Roman authorities. They specify five: invention, arrangement, elocution, memory and delivery.

How does this talk of mine measure up against those requirements?

First, invention. I trust there'll be a little of that, but you be the judges.

Second, arrangement. Orderly, I trust, but not classically so. I've begun as prescribed with an introduction – how could I not? – but I've never learned the subsequent division, into narration or statement, proof, and peroration.

Third, elocution. Hope for the best, by way of appropriate vocabulary, grammar, and figures of speech.

Fourth, memory. No. I admire to the point of awe those few modern speakers who can perform the once familiar art of mastering the skills of invention, arrangement and elocution and delivering their speech extemporaneously, or as if

extemporaneously, without a note. But I can't do it. Accustomed though I am to public speaking, I'd still be too nervous.

Finally, delivery. I work at it, but in a manner Aristotle and Demosthenes and Cicero and Quintilian would find tediously limited. The classical art of delivery employs visual as well as verbal rhetoric, body as well as voice; and when I stand on a platform I am, like most academics – like most Australians? – nearly all voice and no body. My voice, moreover, has little music compared with say, the voice of Henry Parkes. No shrill falsetto, no deep resounding chest notes.

Here I can't resist an interpolation, whether or not the ancients would have approved. Cobden Parkes was born in 1890. When I met him in I think 1965, I noticed that the hand that shook mine had a missing finger. I remembered that he had lost the finger half a century earlier, shot off at Anzac Cove as he stood beside Major-General William Bridges, mortally wounded by possibly the same Turkish sniper. I had a strange historical thrill: here I was, grasping a hand damaged at Gallipoli which belonged to a man whose father had been born exactly a century earlier, in the year of Waterloo. Back to my text.

Men and Women of Australia. That book is one of four recent selections of Australian speeches. I know of only one such election published before 2004: *Australia Speaks. An Anthology of Australian Speeches*, by A.L. McLeod, 1969. McLeod was an American lecturing at the University of Sydney after an education which had made him familiar with the great speeches of his homeland's history, and he was surprised to find nothing comparable in Australian syllabuses. Have you ever heard of McLeod's anthology? One person borrowed the ANU Library's copy between 1979 and 1994. Then in 2004 came three anthologies, and another in 2005, and also in 2004 a study of prime ministerial rhetoric. Suddenly we have become aware, or some publishers and authors are encouraging us to become aware, of a phenomenon which fills our air but which we have ignored or taken for granted. Alongside Michael Fullilove's book on the shelf stand three other books of speeches and one other about speeches. *Speaking for Australia. Parliamentary speeches that shaped our nation*, edited by Rod Kemp and Marion Stanton. *Well May We Say. The speeches that made Australia*, edited by Sally Warhaft. (Like Fullilove, she takes her title, *Well may we say*, from one by Gough Whitlam.) *Stirring Australian Speeches. The definitive collection, from Botany to Bali*, edited by Michael Cathcart and Kate

Darian-Smith. And finally, *The Power of Speech. Australian Prime Ministers Defining the National Image*, by James Curran.

Fullilove begins in 1901: Our greatest *modern* speeches. Kemp and Stanton take in only the Commonwealth parliament. Curran begins with Whitlam and ends with Howard, exploring the changing rhetoric of our leaders as the crimson thread of empire frays and fades and finally disappears. Warhaft draws on the whole of our history, and so do Cathcart and Darian-Smith. Like Fullilove's selection, these two range widely, drawing on other genres besides parliamentary speech. Cathcart and Darian-Smith, drawing ingeniously on police records, give us a sample of people's oratory from the Yarra Bank. Warhaft gives us half-time speeches by football coaches (VFL, since she is a Melburnian), and Fullilove has Peter Rose's eulogy at the funeral of his father Bob, legendary Collingwood captain and coach. There are plenty of other eulogies, but we barely glimpse the genre most productive of public speech for most of Australian history, the sermon – on which more anon.

Most of the editors make large claims for their choice. Speeches that shaped our nation. Our *Greatest Modern Speeches*. *The* speeches that made Australia. *The definitive* collection. Nearly all the books have helpful introductions, but none really attempts to justify such hyperbole, and it's tacitly contradicted by the diversity of their selections. Only Kemp and Stanton think that a speech by Peter Costello shaped our nation. Only Fullilove finds greatness in Russell Crowe's speech accepting an Oscar. Warhaft and Cathcart-Darian Smith each have one speech by Henry Parkes, but Warhaft has the crimson thread and the other book has his oration at Tenterfield in 1889. Menzies is plentifully represented, but only two of his speeches are in all four selections: 'The Forgotten People', and his welcome to the Queen in 1963, when he was nearly 70.

I did but see her passing by
And yet I love her till I die.

Here was a speech drenched in emotion which some thought embarrassed the youngish Queen as his father's rhetoric had embarrassed the young Menzies.

Everyone includes Paul Keating's address at Redfern, but Fullilove gives him seven other entries, Warhaft only one other and Cathcart and Darian-Smith none. I wonder what significance to read into that, and into the still greater variety of judgments about John Howard. One entry in Cathcart and Darian-Smith, two in

Fullilove, three in Warhaft, and not one of them appears in all three. The choice of women (ranging from four to 18) shows a similar diversity: only Dame Enid Lyons appears in all selections. Unlike the USA, Australia has no largely agreed list of great speeches. There is no canon of our oratory.

Now comes along ABC Radio National, that 'impossibly excellent' amenity, as John Doyle has called it, inviting listeners to name their 'most unforgettable' speeches, not just of Australian origin but delivered anywhere in the world, and at any time in history. This project was devised by the network's marketing manager, Verity Leatherdale, who had the inspiration to sense just how well suited it was to an audience which, as she puts it 'loves ideas and well-crafted language'. She had already thought of such a project before discovering all those books. She knew of recent overseas precedents, and I wonder whether they may have provoked Australian publishers and editors. There was a spate of books in 1992. In the USA William Safire, a connoisseur of language who was once a speechwriter for Richard Nixon, published *Lend Me Your Ears. Great Speeches in History*, and Gary Wills, an astonishingly versatile historian, published *Lincoln at Gettysburg. The words that remade America*, the most illuminating study I know of speechmaking. In England that year Brian MacArthur edited *The Penguin Book of Twentieth Century Speeches*, followed in 1995 by *The Penguin Book of Historic Speeches*. How far these books were causes and how far effects of a growing interest in the subject, I don't know. As long ago as 1990 I was invited by an enterprising publisher to edit an anthology of Australian speeches, but the project got away from me. Graham Freudenberg, in his foreword to Fullilove's book, discerns

renewed interest in speeches – well-founded, I believe, in the recognition of their significance in the democratic processes, and, perhaps, in an old-fashioned liberal yearning for a national and international debate based on argument and reason.

I think 'liberal yearning' is a good word for our time and for many places.

I wonder about the connexion between these various enterprises and a growing academic interest in the phenomenon of speech, or as some scholars are saying, orality – an interest displayed lately by two graduates of our History program. Alan Atkinson published in 2002 his book *The Commonwealth of Speech: an argument about Australia's past, present and future*. Talking and History, he writes, are linked. 'History's oxygen is the sound of voices, past and present'. Atkinson's central interest

is in daily conversation, but he does offer a perceptive analysis of one set of speeches, those made in Sydney on 26 January 1988, and he touches on the Queen's Australian oratory, from 1954 to 2000. He notes in passing the importance of vice-regal oratory, reporting Sir Zelman Cowen's statement that a governor-general's speeches were the most important things he did, and observing that Sir William Deane's speeches contributed largely to his success in the office. Joy Damousi and a current senior member of the History Program, Desley Deacon, are editors of a book due out soon *Talking and listening in the age of modernity*. Joy herself has just published in the *American Historical Review* an article on Australian responses to Hollywood talkies.

The Radio National project is also a contribution to that shift. At the end, when 5000 to 6000 votes were counted, what was the result? Most strikingly, only two of the top ten are Australian, and of the top 20 only two more. All are Prime Ministers. No Parkes, no Menzies. In the top 20, one by Alfred Deakin at Bendigo in 1898 (before he was Prime Minister) and one by Ben Chifley, 'The Light on the Hill'. In the top 10, Keating at Redfern and Whitlam outside Parliament House on 11 November 1975. ('Well may we say'.) Gough Whitlam in ninth place finished just ahead of Queen Elizabeth I and just behind Shakespeare's Henry V. Paul Keating in third place finished just ahead of Winston Churchill and just behind Jesus. Between them were Abraham Lincoln at Gettysburg, John F. Kennedy's inaugural address, and Earl Spencer's funeral oration in Westminster Abbey for his sister the Princess of Wales. I report this last item with wonder. Many people must have recently seen and heard part of the speech in Stephen Frears' film *The Queen*, and I guess that won it some votes. I'll suggest later a cause possibly more general, noting here that it's one of three eulogies in the top 20, the others being Pericles on the Athenian war dead as reported by Thucydides, and Mark Antony on Julius Caesar as imagined by Shakespeare.

Why so few Australians? The absence of conservative politicians may reflect the political taste of Radio National's most ardent listeners. But why no other Australians except Keating and Whitlam in the top 10? The writer of a letter to the *Sydney Morning Herald* provides a clue. 'Not only are they alive and well and ex-Labor prime ministers, they are still making speeches'. This contest is for the most unforgettable speeches, and Keating and Whitlam remain in our active memories. If voters have read any of those recent books, they give no sign of being influenced by their judgments. How many more Australians, I wonder, would have made the list if

we had high school or university courses on the history of Australian oratory? Or is that impossible to imagine?

The winner was Martin Luther King, 'I have a dream' 1963, spoken to a live audience at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington estimated at more than 200,000, and a television audience of many millions. Delivered at the height of a campaign to celebrate the centenary of President Lincoln's proclamation emancipating all slaves, and to complete the process of emancipating their descendants. Kennedy's inaugural address in 1961 had been composed by a speechwriter. King wrote out his speech in long hand the night before delivering it. They were the words of a highly literate man who could incorporate in his rhetoric both the poetry of Shakespeare and the idiom and lilt of a Negro spiritual. This was truly speech as action: advancing the cause of civil rights, provoking the award of a Nobel prize in 1964, possibly increasing the risk of the assassination that occurred in 1968, leaving behind in print, tape and film the speech of a martyr. No surprise that 'I have a dream' was most unforgettable to Radio National's listeners. Phillip Adams, master of ceremonies in the ABC tally room, remarked how many of the top choices came from doomed people. Jesus, he observed, was on his way to Golgotha.

Are you surprised that the Sermon on the Mount came in second?

There was a time when perhaps half the people of Australia heard a sermon every Sunday, from pulpits whose occupants drew richly on that founding sermon of Christianity. Jesus' sermon begins with what came to be known as the Beatitudes: Blessed are the poor in spirit, and so on for another eight verses beginning with that word. Blessed are the meek. Blessed are the peacemakers. That part of the sermon has always been a favourite of clergymen, and so is the later passage beginning 'Our father which art in heaven'. For generation after generation of Australians, and especially for the Protestant majority, the Sermon on the Mount was the source for some of the best-remembered biblical phrases. Its words became embedded in many lay memories, and not only Protestant ones. 'Ye are the light of the world', says Jesus. 'A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid.' 'We have a great objective', says the Catholic-educated Ben Chifley 'the light on the hill'.

But how much of that sermon was unforgettable? Who now remembers Jesus' stern injunctions against divorce? Or his unequivocal warning that evil doers and even unbelievers are destined for Hell? And to go back to Jesus' original audience: how many of them actually heard the Sermon on the Mount?

He spoke, writes Matthew, to the multitudes. How many was that? Matthew doesn't say, but he and the other gospel authors do put a figure on another multitude, the one for whose benefit Jesus performed that miracle of catering for a crowd by turning a few loaves and even fewer fishes into enough food to feed them all. Matthew puts that crowd at 5000 men and an unspecified number of women and children; Mark makes it about 4000 in all, Luke 5000 men. Let's assume that a similar number gathered to hear the Sermon on the Mount. How did they hear him?

Two newspapers, the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *People's Advocate* reported a similar number, between 5000 and 8000, addressed by Henry Parkes at his first appearance as a public speaker, in the Great Protest Meeting of 1849. How did anybody in a large audience hear speeches before the age of electrical amplification? This puzzle, like the one about length, could occupy me for an unacceptably long time. I'll be brief. For a start, two observations. First, we can't trust any calculation of crowd size unless the audience has come through turnstiles, or bought tickets, or marched to the venue in countable ranks. Secondly, if you approve of the cause in which the crowd has gathered, you're likely to make a higher estimate of its size than if you don't. Where the two papers which applauded the Great Protest Meeting saw 5000 to 8000 people, the superintendent of police saw 700. When Henry Parkes stood for parliament in 1856, the *Herald* was no longer for him. Its reporter counted 500 people at the first meeting of his campaign. The reporter for his own paper, the *Empire*, made it 800.

Puzzles remain. Sometimes there isn't such a discrepancy between the sympathetic and unsympathetic counter. And what are we to say of Henry Parkes' declaration that in 1831 he was, I quote from Allan Martin, 'among the 250 000 persons who attended the great Newhall Hill meeting in Birmingham'? Allan visited Newhall Hill and found, as he tells us,

a great natural amphitheatre where sloping ground and surrounding houses conjoined to provide the site for meetings of unprecedented size and excitement.

Jesus, we remember, also spoke to a crowd on sloping ground, the side of a mount. We read that the Birmingham audience not only listened but sang, joining in the Union's own hymn.

And thus we raise, from sea to sea,
Our sacred watchword, Liberty!

We read that there were banners and bands, and that silence was secured by means of a bugle-call. This was a festivity, a party. Did it not matter if people couldn't hear the speakers? But what proportion of 250,000 did hear them? And what are we to say of the report that Daniel O'Connell, whom Parkes heard and admired in Birmingham, attracted in Ireland in 1843 a crowd of 400,000? In his biography of O'Connell, Oliver MacDonagh's only comment on this figure is an exclamation mark. Another O'Connell meeting was reported to have attracted a million people. Three times the population of Canberra. All we can be sure of is that these meetings attracted vast crowds. Exactly how vast, we'll never know. How, if at all, did they hear what was being said?

I turn for enlightenment to Benjamin Franklin and Monty Python. Franklin once conducted an experiment in Boston. He was listening to the famous Anglo-American Methodist preacher George Whitefield, and during the sermon he walked back until he could no longer hear Whitefield's words clearly. He then imagined a semi-circle between where he stood and the platform, allowed two square feet per listener, and 'computed', as he wrote,

that he might well be heard by more than thirty thousand ..., which reconcil'd me to the newspaper accounts of his having preach'd to twenty five thousand people in the fields, and to the ancient histories of generals haranguing whole armies, of which I had sometimes doubted.

A modern interpreter of this experiment notes the presence in Boston of buildings that may have blocked sound. In an open space, in a valley, or on a hill or a mount, a powerful speaker might reach perhaps 50,000 people. Only in the age of amplification is it plausible to allow more. Billy Graham at the Melbourne Cricket Ground in 1959 was heard by a crowd filling not only the stands but the ground, counted at over 130,000. They heard him through loudspeakers.

Monty Python's *Life of Brian* imagines a man on the outskirts of the multitude listening to the Sermon on the Mount. What's he saying, he asks? Blessed are the Greeks? Blessed are the cheesemakers? Who knows who in large crowds may have had the speaker's words relayed accurately or inaccurately by people closer in?

The 19th century crowds I've mentioned, both in the United Kingdom and in Australia, had gathered at public meetings. The public meeting is an institution new to that century, whose novelty historians have only lately recognised. *The Oxford English Dictionary* finds its earliest usage in 1817, when a gathering of gentlemen in

Edinburgh campaign against a plan to put up certain buildings: 'We thought', one of these gentlemen recalled later, 'that the magistrates, who allowed them [the buildings] to be set agoing in silence, had betrayed us. We were therefore very angry, and had recourse to another of these new things called public meetings, which we were beginning to feel the power of.' The public meeting is a cultural form invented just after the end of the Napoleonic war, at the beginning of the movement which was called, from 1819 liberalism. Public speaking is a central activity, the public meeting a central institution of liberalism.

The public meeting is a device employed against the agents of established authority by all the Australian orators of the nineteenth century, beginning with William Charles Wentworth and including, as I've mentioned already, Parkes and Lang, including also Sydney Robert Lowe, in Victoria, Peter Lalor, the pioneers of the Eight Hour Day, and so on.

The first serious study of the phenomenon in its Australian setting is an MA thesis in the Menzies library, submitted in 1986. Its author is Takao Fujikawa, who had come to the ANU from Japan intending to do research on attitudes to the Chinese. He noticed how often these attitudes were expressed at public meetings. He had never struck such an institution in Japanese history:

From the point of view of a foreigner, he wrote, public meetings were one of the most important features that distinguished Australia, and other countries with an "Anglo-Saxon" political and social background, from the rest of the world, and the fact that they were prevalent and deeply entrenched in Australia indicates the need to study them systematically.

So he changed topics and did just that.

Australian academic interest in the subject was stirred by the translation in 1989 from German into English of Jurgen Habermas' book *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: an inquiry into a category of bourgeois society*. Habermas' insights inform David Goodman's 1997 article 'Public meetings and Public Speaking in Colonial Australia'. One way and another, the public meeting has begun to get its historic due.

In the 20th century it became obsolete. Television is generally blamed for that, though not entirely by Graham Freudenberg. The public meeting, he writes, has been killed off because that

suits the convenience and self-interests of governments, politicians, party officials, the staff apparatus, including speechwriters, the media commentator,

the radio jocks, the advertising agencies and the security industry. A good first step in raising the standards of practice of Australian speechmaking, Freudenberg declares, would be to restore the public meeting to its former place in our affairs.

He yearns, but he is not hopeful. Notice that speechwriters are on Freudenberg's list of the killers. He should know, being our most famous and our most enduring, having written for Gough Whitlam, Bob Hawke, and three premiers of New South Wales, as he testifies in his nicely titled memoir *A figure of speech*.

Every Prime Minister after Menzies has employed speechwriters, and every President since Kennedy. Not Menzies, who as Allan tells us was contemptuous of the new fashion. He had, he said, 'an obstinate objection to having other people's words put into my mouth'. Has our trust in politicians, never high, been diminished by knowing that their words are written by somebody else? Peggy Noonan, speechwriter for Ronald Reagan, boasts that he would read whatever she put in front of him. Freudenberg fears that George W. Bush's presidency is being defined by speechwriters: 'axis of evil', 'war on terror', 'shock and awe': these are all, he observes, speechwriters' phrases. Don Watson wrote Paul Keating's Redfern speech, dropped it into the letter box at the Lodge, and heard it read unchanged. Kennedy's inaugural speech was written by Ted Sorensen. But William Safire, who wrote speeches for Nixon, described Sorensen as Kennedy's alter ego. Freudenberg had an intimate understanding of what Whitlam wanted to say and how he wanted to say it, and so did Watson when he wrote for Keating. James Curran credits Watson with softening Keating's aggression. The boss must have gone along with that. It's not altogether fanciful to compare these collaborations with the partnership of Mozart and Lorenzo da Ponte, whose genius was to craft words exactly right in substance and style for Mozart to create the music for his singers.

No Liberal prime minister has ever engaged a speechwriter as proficient and conspicuous as Freudenberg and Watson, and why not is an interesting puzzle. John Howard sometimes uses a speechwriter, sometimes not. He does so when he wants to talk on a subject about which he doesn't know much, such as the intellectual history of Australia over the last 50 years. That's the theme of a speech at a dinner celebrating a half century of the monthly magazine *Quadrant* which has provoked much discussion. On this occasion the writer was an economist who evidently didn't know much more than his employer about our history or historiography. Howard's

Quadranting admirer Miranda Devine thought highly of this effort, hailing it in the *Herald* as 'a speech to cement the "real" John Howard's place in history'. Sir William Deane thought otherwise. In a speech launching Barry Jones' memoirs, freed from the inhibitions imposed on a viceroy, Deane quietly derided Howard's message and described *Quadrant* as 'a bastion of complacent mediocrity'.

Judith Brett believes that Howard's strength as a speaker lies in his ability to articulate 'in the banal idiom of everyday life certain simple ideas about what it is to be Australian'. Simple sounding anyway. Take his invocation of mateship as the Australian ideal. James Curran observes that Howard connects mateship to the Anzac legend and disconnects it from the radical tradition embodied in the trade union movement. His attachment to mateship is parodied unforgettably for me in Casey Bennetto's musical *Keating!*, when the actor impersonating Howard stomps around the stage screeching like a deranged cockatoo MATE! MATE! MATE. On the other hand, when I asked the late Sir Paul Hasluck which speeches he remembered, he recalled only one from a federal politician, made by John Howard at the opening of the new Parliament House in 1988. Warhaft has it in her book. John Howard was speaking off the cuff, he told me when I asked him about that speech – a habit he had learned, he said, in high school debates. Views differ about whether Howard speaks better with or without a speech maker.

The use of speechwriters isn't as novel as we may think. There's a long tradition of what might be called retrospective speechwriting. When you read those words of Pericles, think of Thucydides' candid confession:

I have found it difficult to remember the precise words used in the speeches which I listened to myself and my various informants have experienced the same difficulty; so my method has been, while keeping as closely as possible to the general sense of the words used, to make the speakers say what, in my opinion, was called for by each situation.

Edward Gibbon makes up a speech for Augustus addressing the Senate, and tells us how he has gone about it. Governor Arthur Phillip's first speech in Sydney, on 7 February 1788, was transformed by retrospective speechwriting.

Some 700 convicts and their guards were mustered in a cleared space, and the prisoners were ordered to sit down. This posture, wrote one officer, 'enabled them the better to hear and see what was about to be done'. Marines formed a circle around them and fired three shots over their heads. Four officers and a sergeant recorded the governor's words in their diaries. Reading them now, you wouldn't think they were

all listening to the same speech. Historians have picked and chosen between these versions, dwelling variously on Phillip's threat of punishment, his promise of leniency, his hope for reformation. The reading public at home was given in 1789 a version composed after the event by Phillip himself, which was less ample and less vivid than the speech his listeners had heard.

Three quarters of a century later in 1862, Roderick Flanagan published a volume entitled *The History of New South Wales ... compiled from official and other authentic and original sources*. Flanagan's title was too modest, unless he was including himself among the original sources. Phillip had said nothing about the place his colony might occupy in a future British Empire. Flanagan's Phillip was an eloquent prophet of Victorian imperialism. This Phillip lived on in ceremonial speeches and editorials. He couldn't be admitted, however, into the sesquicentennial celebrations of 1938, because Flanagan's Phillip, like Phillip's Phillip, had said a good deal about convicts; and the organisers had resolved that founding felons would be given no place in the pageant of nationhood. So the President of the Royal Australian Historical Society, Karl Cramp, made up a new text, free of the convict taint, in which the key word was 'vision', a word not heard by any listener in 1788. This Phillip had a vision of Sydney fit for a tourist brochure. Cramp's Phillip was as up-to-date in 1938 as Flanagan's had been in 1862. They had both taken Thucydides' policy as a precept, making their subject say what in their opinion was called for by his situation.

Not every speechwriter is a Freudenberg or a Watson, or even a Flanagan or a Cramp. Barry Jones, sometime lecturer in Allan Martin's department at La Trobe and now disenchanted ex-parliamentarian, gives a dismal account of MPs reading to an almost deserted house – speeches composed by people on their staff with no skill in the arts of composition beyond an ability to write words that the member can get through in 20 minutes flat. 'The art of speechmaking', Warhaft warns us, 'is always perceived as being in decline'. Her book and its companions leave no doubt that the art of parliamentary speech has long been in decline, for reasons which would take me another lecture to spell out. Consider how few of the speeches by prime ministers and other politicians chosen for those anthologies were made in parliament. A collection entitled *Advancing Australia. The Speeches of Paul Keating, Prime Minister* is made up of four delivered in parliament and fifty elsewhere.

On the subject of speechmaking at large, however, Warhaft's warning is salutary.

I suspect that more Australians than ever are studying and practising the arts of speechmaking. The quality of debating has never been higher. Teams of young Australian debaters win international competitions. When I asked one of them why, he said he thought that compared with our best performers, the Americans were too solemn and the English too facetious.

One genre is flourishing more than ever. This is the eulogy, especially as spoken at funerals. Eulogies are well represented in those books of speeches, and they are prominently reported in the media. The papers report two for victims of the recent collision on Sydney Harbour. The father of one victim, supported by his wife, 'delivered a moving eulogy'. The husband of another gave 'a touching, hour-long eulogy'. One was in a school chapel, the other in a church. In churches and in chapels at cemeteries and crematoria, it's now common for bereaved spouses, friends, children and grandchildren to speak in the presence of the coffin.

Why? It has much to do with what Pat Jalland in her book *Changing Ways of Death in 20th Century Australia* has described as 'the revival of expressive grief' and Joy Damousi has analysed in similar terms. It has also to do, I think, with a blurring of the border between the ecclesiastical and the secular. The startling popularity of Earl Spencer's eulogy for the Princess of Wales becomes more intelligible in these contexts. A brother publicly expressing heartfelt grief for a dead sister; a layman giving in Westminster Abbey what might once have been regarded as an intrusion into the traditional order of service. Surely for the first time in the Abbey's ten centuries, words from its pulpit were applauded, as if the church were a theatre or a hall.

The eulogy is tending to replace the sermon, a word which now sounds to many ears archaically prescriptive. The Anglican Archbishop Marcus Loane, aged 95, feels it necessary to declare that when he preaches at funerals he is giving sermons, not eulogies. In the mind of the Catholic hierarchy the contemporary style of eulogy has become disturbingly popular. Eulogies at funerals are too numerous, too long, and too secular. So Cardinal Pell ruled, as he announced earlier this year guidelines to control their presence in funeral masses.

It is neither necessary nor desirable, says a report of the guidelines, that the speaker give a life history of the deceased and they should omit any embarrassing remarks about the deceased's romantic conquests or drinking abilities or attacks on the church's moral teachings.

What's happening here? We need a book by Pat Jalland on changing ways of death in 21st century Australia.

Another genre flourishing these days is the dedicated lecture. There are scores of them created as living memorials to people deemed worthy of honour, and at best they are both tributes and contributions to knowledge and understanding. The most recent I attended in this theatre, honoured a doughty Canberra feminist, Pamela Denoon. I've drawn this evening on the lecture given by Allan Martin in honour of Sir Robert Menzies. And it's my privilege to be fourth in line, after Inga Clendinnen, Catherine Hall and John Hirst, honouring in this place the memory of Allan Martin himself.

Bibliography

Allan William Martin

1926-2002

Academic Record:

- | | |
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| 1948 | BA(Hons I in History), University of Sydney |
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| 1955 | PhD, Australian National University |
| 1967 | Fellow of the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia |
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Positions held:

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| 1955-58 | Lecturer in History, NSW University of Technology |
| 1959-64 | Lecturer, Senior Lecturer in History, University of Melbourne |
| 1965-66 | Reader in History, University of Adelaide |
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| 1975-91 | Senior Fellow, Research School of Social Sciences, Australian National University (formerly Senior Research Fellow) |
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| 1957 | Nuffield Dominion Travelling Fellow (London School of Economics) |
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RESEARCH AND INVESTIGATION

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Allan Martin's two principal subjects as a historian, Sir Henry Parkes and Sir Robert Menzies, were both great orators. Among questions to be asked in this lecture are the following. When can a speech be said to have affected history? What has become of that once popular institution the public meeting and that once popular form the sermon? What is the future for speechmaking in an age of speechwriters, doorstep interviews, sound grabs, power points and the internet?

Ken Inglis enjoyed Allan's friendship for more than forty years. They were long-time colleagues in the history department of the ANU's Research School of Social Sciences, and worked closely together on the ten-volume bicentennial project initiated in that department, *Australians. A Historical Library*.

His books include *Churches and the Working Classes in Victorian England*, *Australian Colonists*, *The Stuart Case*, *Sacred Places: War Memorials in the Australian Landscape*, *This is the ABC*, and most recently *Whose ABC?*.