

UNDER NEW HEAVENS

Cultural Transmission and the
Making of Australia

edited by NEVILLE MEANEY



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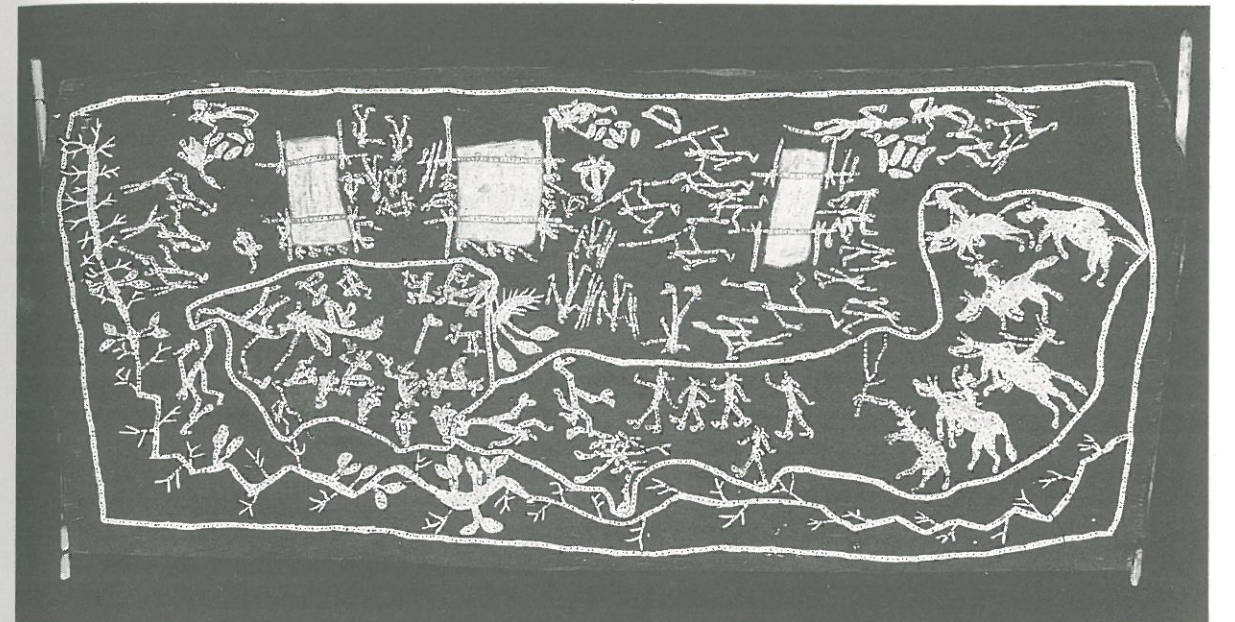
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Yet there *is* something strange, I would agree,
In those dumb continents below the Line.
The roots are European, but the tree
Grows to a different pattern and design;
Where the fruit gets its flavour I'm not sure,
From native soil or overseas manure.

A.D. Hope, 'A Letter From Rome'

EUROPEANS AND ABORIGINES

ANN McGRATH



The First White Men by Paddy Wainburranga. A bark painting depicting the arrival of the first white men in Arnhem Land about 1906.¹

- An Alternative History** — Was culture clash inevitable? — The theft of Aboriginal land — The creation of two Australias
- Culture and History** — What is Australian culture? — The neglect of Aboriginal cultural influence — A young country in *terra nullius* — The conquering of a people denied — A separate history for Aborigines — Interaction between two worlds — Port Jackson Aboriginal society — The social costs of a new Britannia — No place for Aborigines in the Australian ethos — The conservative 'dream' — The radical view
- Naming** — Renaming the land — Conflict over use of Aboriginal names — Chauvinism and ignorance — Identity unresolved
- Preservation and assimilation policies** — Making Aborigines like Europeans — Aboriginal refusal — The 'protection' of Aborigines by governments and missionaries — How preservation policies led to extinction — The destruction of Aboriginal families — The assimilation policies of the 1950s — Cultural resurgence in the 1970s
- Aboriginal Australia and a transplanted culture** — Aboriginal impact on European society — Aboriginal humour — The Aboriginal role in the Australian legend — Contradictions in the legend
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- Cultural tourism** — Aboriginal themes in European art — Recognition of Aboriginal art — Souvenirs and tour guides — Aboriginal control of tourist enterprises
- Conclusion** — The Aboriginal contribution to the making of Australian culture — Mutual co-operation and co-existence — Being more at ease with the land.

AN ALTERNATIVE HISTORY

In 1788, the Aboriginal people of Port Jackson witnessed the arrival into their harbour of strange moving booroowang or islands. They were not particularly surprised, as they had heard from the Botany Bay peoples about the white men who walked on top of them. The Eora and Gammarraigal decided that the more prestigious men were not dangerous, as they were uninitiated. In keeping with local traditions, the ornately dressed British officers were offered Aboriginal women as wives. They gladly accepted, and lived with them, soon learning the essential code of kinship obligations. The convicts had to settle with their own kind, and, as part of their punishment, were denied access to the beautiful Aboriginal women, whose fish-oil scent drove men wild.

A superior British-Aboriginal people came to dominate and monopolise Australia, and they entrenched their position by selling to officers and convicts the rum which was manufactured from a secret supply of crystal pure water. Because of their knowledge of the environment and its resources, Aborigines held great power and were in a strong position to protect their families and kin. Councils of elders also formed visiting delegations to sort out threatened infringements on their rights. For the first fifty years after British arrival, many Aborigines continued to live on their own land, following an altered version of their original hunting and gathering lifestyle, and occasionally camping at the mixed settlements. Aborigines

insisted upon exclusive occupation of the richest lands along the harbour and river-courses such as the Hawkesbury. The British were allowed to use some of these as thoroughfares if they promised peaceful transit and guaranteed respect for special sites.

After lengthy negotiations over a two-year period, the Eora and Gammarraigal eventually agreed to hire out certain less-sacred lands. For these they were paid a fair rental, which included a supply of imported foods, tools, guns and military protection. Bilingual education was set up, where Aborigines, already fluent in English, taught their languages to the Europeans. As the Aborigines excelled at languages, they became the main controllers of literature and linguistics, and played a leading role in setting up Australia's first institutions of learning. They also helped shape new scientific studies based on their expert knowledge of Australian land, climate, plants and animals, but were much more guarded in sharing anything beyond basic spiritual knowledge. The British told their Biblical stories and tales of European warfare to all, but the Aborigines revealed their knowledge only to those they declared worthy. Since they were the original occupants of the area, their historical legends were strongly in demand: minor song cycles, aspects of creation stories and certain oral traditions were shared, but return favours were expected.

As there was a shortage of writing paper in the early settlement, Aborigines were required to memorise the British laws and repeat them orally. In so doing, they gradually incorporated aspects of their own law, thus creating a new legal system based not just on property rights but also reciprocal obligations towards the land organised along family and kinship lines. After a few generations, the peoples had intermarried to such an extent that strong links had been made between the different sets of knowledge, which, after a few generations, became integrated in a unique Australian intellectual tradition.

The peoples too had become integrated, and any trace of Aboriginal descent was regarded as an elite distinction. The 'Australians', as they came to be known in other parts of the world, were famous for achieving an unusual level of co-operation and equity between migrants and indigenous people. They would have received the highest honours from the International Anti-slavery Society except for the unfortunate situation of the convicts, who remained an ill-educated under-class, resenting the power and privileges of their darker-skinned masters. The ruling class used them in their homes as servants. As a result of imported class distinctions and a mutual desire for law and order, inter-marriage was forbidden, and surreptitious unions punished by seizure of the children. Some of the older Aboriginal families were disturbed by this imported inequality, and so they established convict humanitarian societies to help alleviate the misery of this unfortunate community.

But, although given many chances, the convicts' inability to control their addiction to alcohol and their tendency to steal proved their downfall. Even when supplied with extra food, they continued to show little interest in their work and

stole from their kindest masters. They were not a very likeable people, singing coarse songs, taking little interest in dreaming stories, and apparently knowing no morality. They failed to respect the laws of the land, and disturbed the land's spirits by shouting and rock throwing near sacred pools. Some had even been caught carving their initials on rock-faces of the most powerful snake and kangaroo ancestors. When the nation of Australia celebrated its two hundred years of white/black co-operation, the convicts' descendants continued to be a disgruntled, impoverished and unruly lot. In 1988, journalists from all over the world were more eager to record their plight than join in the big party. Many were only after sensationalism, ignoring the successful convicts who had been given their own dreamings, and focusing only on those who aimlessly wasted time in deserts and junkyards.

This did not really happen. But maybe it could have. Such beginnings would have lent a very different tone to relations between Aboriginal and European culture.

If such an alternative history serves to jolt readers from a retrospectivity which assumes that peaceful or respectful co-operation were impossible, then it has achieved its purpose. The official British policy of 'amity and kindness' towards 'natives' superficially promised positive relations, but it did not incorporate respect for their culture, or policies of cultural exchange. The British belief in their racial superiority and the inevitability of 'culture clash' is often given as the reason for conflict with Aborigines, but the material realities of power relations are equally important. The British had numbers, weaponry, infectious diseases and monopolised the best land and food resources. Yet differences and even conflicts are not necessarily insuperable obstacles to achieving co-operation between peoples; it depends on how they are handled. European greed, and the inability or unwillingness of distant imperial government to control its colonists did not help. In dealing with the invaders, Aborigines used a variety of techniques: hospitality/integration, avoidance, violent resistance, and co-operation.

Australia's first settlement at Port Jackson was led by Captain Arthur Phillip, a relatively humane man who, influenced by the European enlightenment, had an idealistic image of the noble savage. He hoped that the settlement could be achieved without bloodshed, and foresaw that the Aborigines might allow their women to marry the British officers. Hoping to prevent any disruptive intercourse with the convict class, he dreamt of friendly, co-operative relations with the Aboriginal people. But when they avoided the settlement, he resorted to kidnapping Arabanoo, and later Bennelong and Colby, in order to force communications between the two groups. First and foremost, however, he was vested with the responsibility for ensuring the survival of the transplanted British. This meant he felt compelled to quell any threats to the colony's success.

Perhaps for colonialism to be successful, the original occupants of the soil inevitably had to suffer. Yet it would not

be surprising if a criminal class, booted out of their own country, received a worse deal. The convicts, although often belonging to the lowest classes, still aspired to improve themselves materially, and held many common cultural goals with the upper classes. Those who behaved and had the desired skills could be treated almost like free settlers. Once their terms had expired they were granted land and paid wages, whereas Aborigines were paid less, and any land temporarily allocated for their use was often taken back again. The convicts' children certainly had plenty of chance to succeed. As part of the colonial enterprise, they could join in and share the spoils. But as the original landowners, Aborigines were inevitably at odds with the enterprise.

It is perhaps predictable that a nation founded primarily by a pack of thieves would steal the land from its indigenous people without treaty or recompense, and let the situation remain so for two hundred years. In the Americas and New Zealand, the treaties were often unjust and later broken, but at least they served as a fundamental recognition that something was being taken away. Many convicts had been transported because of crimes against property owners, yet in the new context, Australia's local land ownership laws were not understood or recognised. By not acknowledging the presence of Aboriginal people in a treaty, the Europeans denied the indigenes their right to land ownership and failed to recognise their right to cultural pride. In denigrating their culture, the colonists created two Australias — one white and one Aboriginal. After misdirected efforts to bring about more unity, they gave up defeated and often chose to forget about the role of Aborigines in Australia's cultural heritage. But until white Australians stop shutting off this past, and truly resolve this continuing conflict, they will not be able to plan for the future.

CULTURE AND HISTORY

While the great majority of Europeans attempted to replace Aboriginal culture with their own, a minority attempted to incorporate aspects of Aboriginal culture into white 'Australian culture' and thereby to achieve, in some measure, convergence between the two cultures. There has been so little written on this crucial part of Australia's cultural history, that the discussion will probably throw up more questions than answers, and it can only be hoped that this might begin a process of comprehending the complexity of these problems.

First, it is necessary to consider popular and intellectual notions of Australian history and culture. The term 'Australian' can be problematic; the explorer Matthew Flinders referred to Aborigines as Australians in 1814, though by 1822 white settlers had adopted the term for themselves. Since then, Australian culture is generally taken to refer to white culture; when Australian achievements are mentioned, this excludes anything that happened beyond two hundred years ago. A British core to the dominant culture is generally assumed, and it is

considered valid to speak of the American influence, or the dynamic impact of the Scottish or Irish, while the Aboriginal influence is usually only referred to in a derogatory or joking sense: for example, that white Australians like to sit on their bums all day, or go 'walkabout'. Even such studies of the creative spirit in Australia as Geoffrey Serle's *From Deserts the Prophets Come* have ignored Aboriginal influences. In their treatment of Australian culture, works such as Donald Horne's *Lucky Country* or Humphrey McQueen's *A New Britannia*, neglect Aboriginal culture, and make no mention of its impact on that of the European invaders.

Studies of Aboriginal society are put into a special and somewhat exotic category. From the 1880s the study of Aborigines became more 'scientific', and most studies were produced by anthropologists, whereas previously they had been written by amateur observers. Baldwin Spencer and F.J. Gillen's 1899 publication on central Australian tribes created an international sensation. Aborigines were seen as 'Stone Age man', identified with a 'savage' or 'early' stage of human social evolution. Later interpreters such as Frazer, Durkheim and Freud used such data as evidence for human development theories. As W.E.H. Stanner wrote

They were made to appear a people just across, or still crossing, that momentous border which separates nature from culture, and trailing wisps of an animalian past in their human period.

A.P. Elkin's *The Australian Aborigines*, published in 1938, was one of the first comprehensive attempts to portray their society.² Many more followed, but scholars failed to relate new understandings of Aboriginal culture to European culture in Australia.

Despite admission of some conflict and inequality, at the basis of most scholarly analysis of white Australian society was an assumption of a dynamic people, who changed, improved and progressed. Historian W.K. Hancock thus wrote 'the vigorous flow of Australian life cuts ever-changing channels for the irrigation of limitless virgin plains'. Aboriginal society was portrayed in opposition: as static, as not having shaped the environment. Transfixed in time, change — always imposed from outside — was inevitably destructive. Structural/functionalist influence in the study of anthropology had helped shape such an image, which was then reinforced by the nature of Aboriginal oral tradition, lacking, as it did, the clear chronology provided by epics of warfare, land usurpation and the hierarchical kinglines of Africa. In harmony with social Darwinism and other nineteenth century theories centred on 'the survival of the fittest', Aboriginal society was thus seen, unlike modern societies, as primitive and therefore unchanging. By definition their only choices were destruction, preservation or assimilation.

Official propaganda preceding the recent Bicentenary celebrations emphasised consensus within a diverse nation. Abor-

igines could not, however, be comfortably slotted into this conceptual framework; they were neither descendants of early settlers, 'ethnics' or migrants since their presence on the continent extended back almost fifty thousand years. Aborigines were a nuisance category who might spoil the 'birthday' fun for everybody. With the advent of the New Year of 1988, the mood shifted dramatically. The Prime Minister, Bob Hawke, announced that the Bicentenary could be a time of coming to terms with and even righting some of the wrongs of the past. Perhaps these were only words, but an increasing number of non-Aboriginal Australians sensed an urgent need to do something, with an attendance of over thirty thousand at the Australia Day protest march. New South Wales school teachers demanded that Aboriginal history be an intrinsic part of the curriculum. This conciliatory mood may have been ephemeral. In March 1988 a Liberal government which strongly opposed Aboriginal land rights was elected in New South Wales and, on taking office abolished the Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs and merged its functions with 'ethnic affairs'.

That white Australians still speak of themselves as a 'young country' with a 'short history' says much. Convict society has thus been wrongly portrayed as providing the foundations of Australia, and the arrival of Captain Phillip as marking the beginnings of Australian history, with 26 January as Australia's birthday. Which Australia? What occurred post-1788 somehow happened on a land that was like a blank slate. White Australians have unconsciously rubbed out everything that went before as irrelevant or non-existent. The legal concept of *terra nullius* — Australia as an unoccupied land or wasteland — focused and strengthened such attitudes. As historian James Bonwick wrote in 1882, 'The assumption of absolute jurisdiction over the new territory followed the occupation, just as if it had no previous inhabitants'. In 1930 Hancock wrote that 'the British peoples have alone possessed her [Australia]'.

In discussions about the nature of cultural transmission to Australia, an uninhabited continent is often presupposed. Australia, the land, was 'discovered' and the fragment of European culture was settled upon it, inscribing its own meanings and its own story, as though no story had ever before been told or inscribed there. Such thinking shows the endurance of racist assumptions, and contains an implicit endorsement of the values of imperialism and colonialism.

The British 'settled' a country rather than 'conquered' a people: Australian history has been understood as occurring in a specific geographical environment rather than a human or cultural one. Pre-1788 Australia is thus still spoken of as 'virgin' country, a 'raw continent', 'a wilderness' for it was 'untamed', 'unsubjugated'. One of its most-mentioned characteristics was indeed 'emptiness'. Hancock, and later R.M. Crawford and A.G.L. Shaw argued that resistance came from the land itself rather than its people: 'In Australia there could be no serious resistance from the aborigines with their primitive culture...'³ Encouraged by school textbooks and popular journalism, the image of Australia as an unoccupied or little-occupied

land — without people or history — lives on in the Australian psyche.

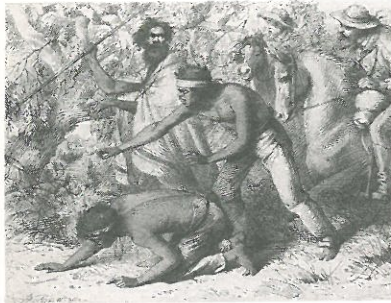
Although nineteenth century historians included Aborigines as curiosities and obstacles to pioneering, those of the twentieth century exercised a cult of forgetfulness. Only in the 1970s did significant work on Aboriginal history start to emerge. A national blindspot still prevents historians from integrating Aborigines into Australian general history. The key themes of written history exclude them: for example, convict history, the gold rushes, land settlement, the wars, the history of work, political history, the history of the family, women's history. Although it is hardly surprising that historians of the dominant culture should exclude a minority group, Australian historiography has been consciously or unconsciously staged to present and cast the colonisers' experiences, with Aborigines only occasionally allowed a cameo appearance.

If Australian history is to be a properly multi-dimensional one, the Aboriginal presence and participation in all the above colonial themes must be analysed. While the Aborigines and convicts often lived together and worked side by side, they also clashed with each other and sometimes even killed one another. Gold rushes frequently dispossessed the Aborigines of land and key waterholes, and prospectors exploited Aboriginal paths for their purposes. Yet Aborigines often led diggers to major gold discoveries, and some later laboured on goldfields. White land settlement led to frontier wars with Aborigines. Aboriginal participation in world wars is only recently being recognised. The important role of Aborigines as rural workers has been left out of the story of land development, and Aboriginal struggles for land and the vote have not been written into political history. Recent studies of the family have left out the very different structure and historical experience of Aboriginal families. Studies of women have emphasised white urban and rural women; their interaction with Aboriginal women has received scant attention, and only recently have Aboriginal women's own historical experiences emerged in specialist studies and autobiography. Despite a recent growth of literature on Aboriginal history, it continues to be historically ghettoised into a 'special' area.

This blinkered view of Australian history reflects deep-set social and cultural tensions. It is easier to create a national identity out of a pure 'white' past than acknowledge the Aboriginal presence in the landscape. European historical traditions, not having to deal with colonial scenarios, did not offer ready-made solutions.

Prominent historians of Aboriginal themes, such as Henry Reynolds, still deal separately with the Aboriginal and the white sides of the frontier.⁴ If the historical story can only be told from one perspective or the other, it reinforces the notion that the barriers between the two groups are impenetrable. Historical relations were interactive, and the more sharply the dividers are drawn, the less will be understood.

As important and continuing actors in the making of Australia's particular culture Aborigines cannot be omitted from



William Strutt, 1825–1915, (*The blacks following the trail, Mr Duncan, and Munlight*) (c. 1876) pencil & wash drawing: 22.2 X 27.7 cms, National Library of Australia.

its history. Even the initial decision on the part of the British to choose Australia for a convict outpost was significantly determined by British perceptions of and responses to Aboriginal culture. Cook and Banks had reported that there were few of them; they mistakenly thought they were exclusively coastal dwellers and that the inland was unpopulated. It is now thought that possibly as many as 750,000 Aborigines lived in Australia and there may have been more, but this is still a matter of controversy. Nonetheless Australia's smaller and less warlike indigenous population was a significant determinant in the decision to choose Australia as a convict dumping ground. It certainly enhanced its attractiveness compared with the African coasts or New Zealand.

Little is yet known of the interactions between the pre-existing Aboriginal world and the migrating European world. Europeans initially came in a group of one thousand, and on the various frontiers, sometimes only in ones or twos. So, in 1788, Europeans occupied only a tiny region, Port Jackson, and Aboriginal civilisation dominated the rest of Australia. But even the Sydney area did not become a cultural island. Officers such as Watkin Tench and David Collins tried to understand the Aboriginal society around them. Tench flirted with Aboriginal women, and enjoyed writing vivid descriptions of their naked bodies in his journal. Convicts stole Aboriginal canoes, weapons and fishing gear. Others were terrified of them, and feared leaving the main settlement. Within a decade, Aborigines were frequently observed to be dancing corroborees and camping around the town streets. Even by 1838, European settlements represented only a relatively small 'archipelago' in a predominantly Aboriginal Australia.

It is doubtful that the motley crew of convicts and officers were representative of European 'civilisation' as such. The officers, if their journals are to be believed, excluded convicts from this category, for they did not expect decency or morality of them. At least initially, Aborigines were more likely to be trusted. In February 1788, Phillip blamed Aboriginal dislike of Europeans on convict aggression and interference. In the 1800s, escaped convicts were accused of masterminding brutal attacks by Aborigines on the Hawkesbury settlers.

Rousseau-like notions of the 'noble savage' had been strengthened by Cook's visits to Tahiti, and certainly influenced Phillip and his officers, but how long the 'noble savage' perception of the Aborigine lasted in Australia is debatable. Australian Aborigines were often spoken of by the late eighteenth-century Europeans as 'hard primitives' as opposed to the 'softer' varieties of the Polynesian islands. It was more difficult for the 'refined' classes of England to project their own ideas of innocence and beauty on to them. Some early artists and writers certainly depicted Aborigines as having features and proportions akin to classical Greek statues. They were represented to the English public as living in a timeless harmony, without need of material possessions or artifice. By the 1830s, however, artists were depicting the 'ugly' Aborigines: they were shown wearing worn-out European clothing and debased by drink.⁵

British cultural institutions were being transplanted not just into a unique geographical environment, but also into a distinctive human and cultural environment. To understand the dynamics of life at Port Jackson it is therefore necessary to comprehend the local Aboriginal society, which possessed a different set of values and mores from the British. For Aborigines, the ultimate creative act binding humans to the land was not tilling the soil but travelling across it. As they visited different sites, they retold and relived the dreaming stories, and they conducted rituals to ensure the increase of plant and animal resources. People, land and animals were inextricably linked in a holistic cosmology which dictated many different facets of everyday life. Rather than progress, they valued continuity. They upheld the sharing ethic and obligations to a wide kin network rather than the individualistic principles of reward for labour. A people and community-oriented lifestyle, their work and ritual were divided along gender lines, and status was awarded according to age, land relationships and ritual knowledge.

The lengthy Aboriginal occupation of Australia is today not considered particularly significant by white Australians, probably because they were more interested in their European roots, and the particular culture which developed there. White Australians liked to see themselves as part of a Western cultural tradition, but newer and fresher, freed from the vices of the old world. Hancock, putting the point succinctly, asserted that the British Australians were 'liberated from the congealed ice-forms of convention and class which are packed so tightly in a small northern island'. What has so far failed to register is that the construction of this new world had severe social costs. The hazards of unfamiliar land and climate, the anxieties of distance and of being located in an Asian-dominated region are acknowledged. But the costs of forcefully appropriating land from indigenous peoples, which led to new hazards of inequality and new forms of robbery, murder, neglect, exploitation and cruelty are not easy to balance.

National forgetfulness may flow from a collective guilt. As historian Charles Rowley wrote, 'The facts are so disgraceful that many refuse to accept them, and blame the victims for shameful scenes of degradation'. White Australians would rather see themselves as colonised by a beloved Britain than as unwanted colonisers of Aborigines.⁶

The long-held image of Australia as a 'quiet continent' exemplifies the power of that mythology, as did the craving to prove racial virility by fighting overseas wars. Only half-buried in the subconscious of white Australians is an awareness that European settlement also included a dirty war — one better forgotten.

White Australians, descendants of transplanted British, have been a culturally dislocated group. Far away, the British back home had a sense of collective identity and historical continuity. In the British Isles, each country has its own ancient history, part of a continuing tradition still being unearthed in the surrounding landscape. Australia's ancient history was

something most non-Aborigines have learnt virtually nothing about. European intellectual traditions offered little which could be borrowed to help solve this dilemma. Consequently, white Australians have been involved in a mythological quest to forge relationships with the landscape through literature and legend.

However, the 'national consciousness' of European Australians has so far prevented them from incorporating Aboriginal culture into the dominant culture, or finding it a place within the Australian ethos. Aborigines do not have a positive place in either radical or liberal historical traditions.

Diverse techniques of marginalising the 'Aboriginal problem' have filtered into popular conceptions of Australian history, and are overtly used for political purposes. A conservative 'dream' is that Australia was indeed a virtually empty continent, with maybe a few Aborigines in the central desert. Aborigines were thus easily pushed back or retreated voluntarily. Their culture was primitive, and they never made any profits out of Australia, or made it 'progress' like white people have. When the British came along the indigenes were given the same opportunities, but they did not take advantage of them. According to such reasoning, their current position was both inevitable and their own fault. In the mid-1980s, Hugh Morgan, Managing Director of Western Mining Corporation, argued that 'God was on our side' in the land rights debate. He echoed J.D. Lang's 1856 argument that God 'never intended [Australia] should be occupied by men so incapable of appreciating its resources...'. Like historian Geoffrey Blainey, Morgan was concerned that white sovereignty might be undermined by those promoting the issue of Aboriginal sovereignty.⁷

Radicals since the 1960s have, by contrast, idealised the victim and portrayed Aborigines as a people who lived in perfect harmony with their environment, without disease, warfare or famine. In trying to come to terms with national conflict and guilt, Aborigines are being depicted as noble warriors, and all whites as cruel and destructive interlopers.

These polarised views lead people to conclude either that Aboriginal history may be ignored or that Europeans have no place in Aboriginal Australia.

NAMING

The naming by colonials of places in Australia was a means of redefining the landscape in a transplanted European image. Explorers, surveyors, mappers, artists and writers all combined to label, draw and colour the blank page of the continent they called Australia. Many chose to forget the Aboriginal presence altogether, grafting European culture onto an imagined 'pristine' environment. Not all agreed, however, that the Aboriginal memory should be totally obliterated. Dissension reflected a certain discomfort with the colonisers' predicament.

In the earliest settlement, white settlers used the names left behind by Cook such as New South Wales, Botany Bay, and Port Jackson. In 1788, few Aboriginal names were known to the British. In June 1791, the town marked out at the

place the British called Rose Hill was named Parramatta. According to Judge-Advocate Collins, this was the name used by the 'natives' (no language group or tribe given) to distinguish that part of the country. According to Elizabeth Macarthur the word meant 'head of the river' but a more common translation is 'the place where eels lie down'. It may well have meant both, as Aboriginal names can have multiple meanings, and Aborigines supplied different explanations according to context. Despite this interest in learning Aboriginal names, the only other Aboriginal name on one 1802 map of the settlement was Woolloomooloo. Other maps suggest that the names of different reaches and islands of the harbour were known. Benelong had explained that Memel was his own property, handed on from his father. It was known by the British as Goat Island because goats had been left to forage there. To the British, such a recent event was evidently more significant than learning about the Aboriginal cultural traditions of that land.

No official concern regarding Aboriginal place names was apparent until Major Mitchell's instructions to New South Wales surveyors in 1828.

You will be particular in noting the native names of as many places as you can on your map... the natives can furnish you with names for every flat and almost every hill.

He was infuriated when one surveyor called a river the Nile, describing it as 'absurd' and insisting on the 'proper native names'. The guidelines were for native place-names to be used wherever they could be ascertained. Mitchell specifically forbade surveyors giving landscape features any names other than native names. He was interested in distinctiveness and accuracy, though most of his names seem quite incorrect, and he often recorded Aboriginal expressions of incomprehension. Nonetheless, he was motivated by humanitarian ideals: 'Surely it behoved a nation so active in the suppression of slavery to consider betimes, in taking up new countries, how the Aboriginal race can be preserved'.

In the 1830s, in an address to the Royal Geographical Society of London, Captain R.E. Vetch of the Royal Engineers urged against disturbance of or change of Aboriginal names because of the 'sacredness of antiquity' and the significant information they contained. He believed Aboriginal vocabulary and culture should be preserved. His approach seemed to be informed by a desire to unite the new nation with its ancient past. Speaking to the Australian branch of the society in 1897, a Victorian, A.J. Wright, put an opposing view which was more in the tradition of British imperialism. He argued that the colonising people should not separate 'history and geography', and the only valid history was that of the colonisers.

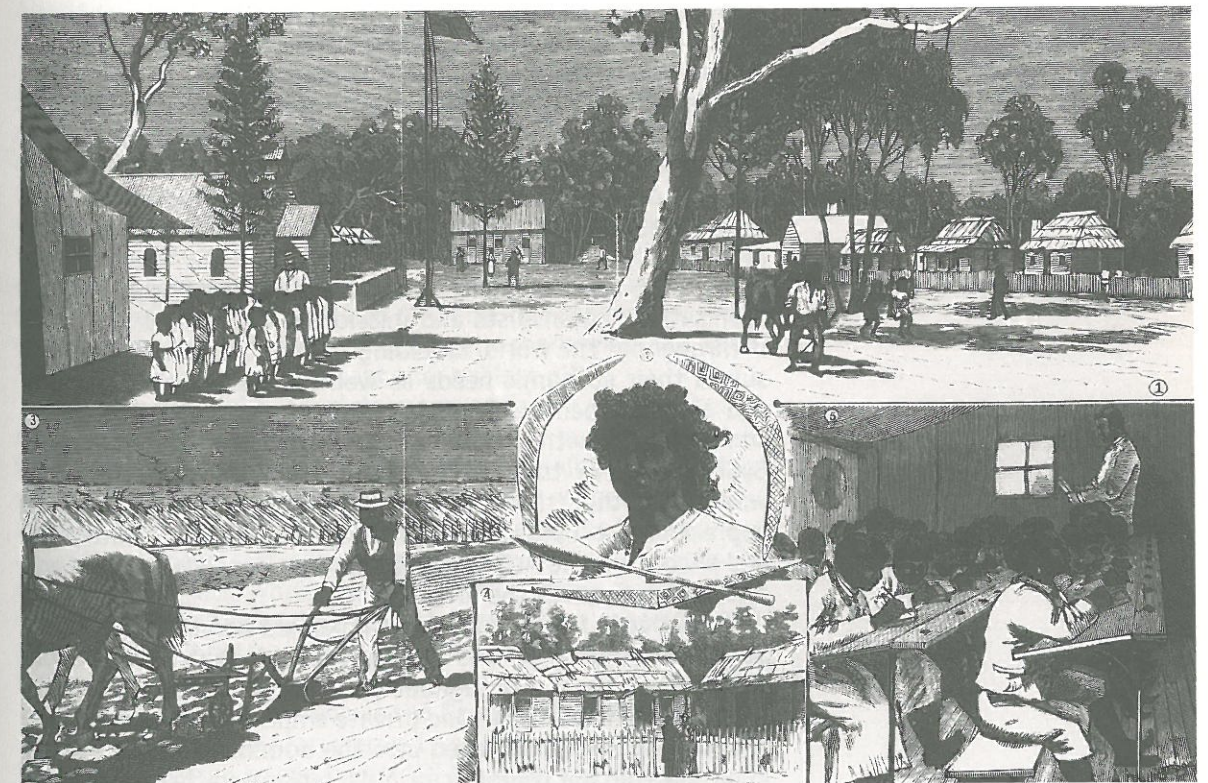
... if the Anglo-Saxon intruder, who came, and saw, and took possession found no memorial of the past,

there was spread before him a clean page on which to register the memories and tradition of the race that was to transform the untilled wilderness into garden, the haunts of the savage into homes of industry and civilisation. It was his privilege to lay the foundation of a Greater Britain, with all its inheritance of noble names and noble deeds, and to record them in a patriotic and dignified manner. In fact, to place his brand on his new acquisition.

Naming was thus seen as assertion of proprietorial rights. Wright attacked the use of native names because the race was primitive, dying out, and of no relevance. He referred to the United States, Canada and Tasmania as being impressively named according to 'common origin and a patriotic sentiment'. Although few would have used such romantic rhetoric, his words do express many commonly-held beliefs. But not all agreed. Others wanted to be distinctly Australian, and Aboriginal names were one way of achieving this.

Glorifying British civilisation was essentially chauvinistic; it meant blindness to the evidence of ancient land use throughout the Australian continent. Ignorance led many white Australians to assume Aborigines had left no heritage in the landscape; yet there was a wealth of cave paintings, ceremonial sites, carved trees and other cultural artefacts, and complex surviving mythological and spiritual traditions.

Warangesda, Aboriginal School N.S.W., 1883. Aboriginal children were taught to adopt British cultural values relating to dress, religion, literacy, housing, work and imperial loyalty. Yet due to pressure from white parents, they were educated in separate schools.



Aboriginal names such as Ballarat, Canberra, Murwillumbah, Mooloolaba, Maroochydore and Yatala are haunting reminders of long-gone peoples. However, there are others where Aboriginal culture survives: Yarrabah, Moree, Brewarrina and Yirrkala. Some place-names are memorials to frontier violence. Slaughterhouse Creek, Murdering Gully, Myall and Battle Creeks. Brass plaques have been erected in a number of towns and cities to commemorate the last of a tribe or long-past peoples, although these are few compared with those dedicated to European pioneers.⁸

Renaming the land was a powerful process, central to the colonial appropriation of land, and part of the ideology of *terra nullius*. Where Aboriginal names remain, they are often inaccurate, or misplaced. Aboriginal naming is a sacred tradition, closely connected with a cosmology of dreaming paths and creation stories. Yet, as non-Aboriginal Australians have taken so little interest in learning Aboriginal culture, many of the words can only be used (or misused) today in a cultural vacuum. Nonetheless, Australia's place names are testimony to its people's unresolved dilemmas regarding geographical and cultural identity.

PRESERVATION AND ASSIMILATION POLICIES

Just as the British settlers hoped that the land would be remoulded with their nomenclature, tilled fields, hedges and church spires, so too most of them, when they gave thought to the matter, also desired to see the Aboriginal inhabitants turned into model English ladies and gentlemen. Transplanted gender-roles and notions of family caused friction between the two cultures. While some advocated the 'preservation' of Aboriginal culture, the dominant push was towards 'assimilation', or making Aborigines become like Europeans. Such aspirations reflected British arrogance, and their innate sense of cultural, and later racial, superiority. They saw their culture, or at least its hegemonic version, as representing a peak of 'civilisation', colonialists and missionaries promised to spread it throughout the world. Moulding others to their own likeness suited their economic needs as well as their aesthetic, moral and spiritual beliefs. When Aborigines showed no desire to communicate with or settle near the whites at Warrang or Sydney Cove in the 1790s, the British kidnapped them. It was hoped that the kidnapped Colby and Bennelong would appreciate the opportunity of living like English gentlemen, and encourage the Aborigines to become dependent upon, and submissive towards the invaders.

Although, for a time, some colonists admired the 'noble savage' Aborigine, it was always thought that nature could be improved upon. Throughout post-1788 history, state officials, church missionaries and private employers expected Aborigines to become integrated into the dominant culture. When Aborigines did not comply, cultural inferiority rather than deliberate choice was blamed.

When Aborigines adapted to the new culture, learning its songs, adopting its etiquette, wearing European clothing, and mastering its work skills, they did so for their own reasons. They rarely abandoned their own culture, and continued to conform to its lifestyle and values. To Aborigines, this was what being human was all about. Missionaries often labelled them 'rice-Christians', for they avoided the sedentary life expected on a mission settlement, appearing only for food. Unlike the Polynesians, they did not readily adopt Christianity, for their own belief system was holistic, and intricately connected with the land, its animals and the individual person's place in it.

Europeans tried in a variety of ways to assimilate the Aboriginal people. They argued that if only the Aborigines would accept Western cultural mores and give up their own, they could be allowed more equality of opportunity. This pattern of thought illustrates well the essential lopsidedness of the European models of interaction with Aboriginal culture.

The Reverend Richard Johnson, an Evangelical Anglican clergyman, who came out on the First Fleet, attempted such a British-style education of the local Aborigines. He and his wife adopted a young girl, Abaroo, when her family died of smallpox. Although Abaroo adopted European cultural codes during her stay in their house, when she was ready, she left for the bush with an Aboriginal husband; the Johnsons were infuriated by this 'reversion' to nakedness and 'savage ways'. The ability of Aborigines to learn and adapt to white customs was frequently remarked upon, but continuing contact with Aboriginal relations or continuity of Aboriginal lifeways was considered proof that the 'civilising' mission had failed.

Governor Lachlan Macquarie hoped that Aborigines might be educated to become black yeoman farmers. When Wesleyan missionaries at Blacktown in 1821 attempted to 'civilise' and assimilate young Aborigines, the children's parents tried to take them away, being repelled by British behaviour. As one missionary remarked, if 'they were taught to think as we think, to feel as we feel, to live as we live, then the aboriginals would be blended with the general population'. By 1850, both missionaries and Aborigines had given up; few conversions were achieved. Aborigines were consequently condemned for their 'depravity' in refusing to accept the 'noblest gift'.

During the 1860s Aborigines agreed to live on Ramahyuck mission in Gippsland for most of the year, but they used it for their own purposes. For many, it was a holiday place; they refused to work there unless for standard wages, and they usually preferred to perform seasonal work for the hop-farmers or on local sheep stations. Aborigines often used missions as refuges from brutal whites, or as resource centres, as stopping-off places for the newly introduced 'fast foods', especially the generosity of Christmas time, when hitherto unseen Aborigines would appear for servings of plum pudding.

Some missionaries, such as the Benedictines of New Norcia in Western Australia, interfered less with Aboriginal beliefs. But most objected to the 'nomadic' lifestyle, and tried to turn them into a peasantry. The Bible was used to justify the belief

that herding societies were more primitive than tillers of the soil. Aboriginal attitudes to land, social structure, property and spiritual life acted as obstacles to Christianising efforts. Aboriginal kin responsibilities conflicted with the Protestant work ethic.

Although the government and missionaries were often at loggerheads over competing ideals, they spoke in much the same language. Debates ensued as to whether Aborigines should be actively assimilated, dispersed into the general community, segregated or preserved as a 'tribal remnant'. There was no thought that Aborigines be consulted about what they wanted.

A 'preservation' approach to Aboriginal culture followed from the realisation that the native peoples might become extinct. Government and missionaries thus acted to 'protect' Aborigines by setting up reserves. For different motives, scientists, such as Baldwin Spencer and Donald Thompson, also desired to preserve the 'pristine' Aborigines from the degrading influences of alien white cultures. The 'inviolable' Arnhem Land reserve was set apart for this purpose.

Although sincere humanitarians existed, preservation and protection arguments were usually motivated by a desire to 'clean up' white towns or create controlled labour pools. Yet financing was never adequate to ensure that they escaped the category of a dying race. Hence throughout the first half of the twentieth century, Queensland Aborigines, who earned their own living off the land or in temporary employment, were rounded up and herded onto large-scale, state-controlled reserves. This destroyed their economy and their independence, and dislocated them from traditional land and families. The admixture of many different peoples destroyed local languages which were important vehicles of culture and ceremony. Removed from their intricate land associations, the Aboriginal elders found it very difficult to pass on traditional law to the younger generations.

Much can be deduced about white definitions of what constituted 'civilisation' from the rhetoric of Aboriginal policies and training schemes. The Northern Territory government authorities spoke in the 1920s of 'uplifting' Aborigines by training them in 'civilised virtues'; they would be turned into 'self-supporting peasants' and thus prove an asset rather than a liability to the state. Many of the supposedly humanitarian training schemes, however, only served to fill gaps in the white labour market. European gender expectations had always been central to assimilative thought. Macquarie's plans embodied similar principles. Bennelong's refined dress taste and genteel manners towards white women were applauded, and at Coranderrk in Victoria, the women were classed as 'ladies' because they wore Victorian finery, and produced exquisite needlework.⁹ In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Aboriginal girls were trained as domestic servants, and sent off to work on low pay in middle-class homes in the major cities. Boys were trained to be farm-hands.

Aboriginal family organisation was seen as an obstacle to be swept aside in the wake of 'progress'. From 1883-1969,

the New South Wales government was empowered to seize Aboriginal children from their parents. Under the Child Welfare legislation, Aboriginal children were defined as neglected simply because they were Aboriginal. In the name of 'educating' them when young and 'releasing' them from the 'degrading' influences of the Aboriginal camp, they were institutionalised and then apprenticed out as a cheap labour force.

Such schemes differed from colony to colony and from state to state. From 1886, in Victoria, lighter-skinned Aborigines were not permitted to live on Aboriginal reserves, whereas in Queensland, there was hardly any distinction drawn between those of darker and lighter skin-colour. In the Northern Territory from the 1920s, those of mixed European descent were separated from their parents as soon as they could be captured by police. Parents were traumatised, often darkening their children with charcoal in the hope that the authorities would not notice them. The policy, according to Chief Protector Cook, was 'to outbreed colour altogether'. The 'full-bloods' were dying out, and if the lighter-skinned Aborigines were acculturated and racially integrated, no 'problem' would remain. What was overlooked was the fact that such state interference in people's lives brought a sense of a shared historical experience, which in fact created a strong community identity. The common suffering under the oppression and brutality of the state, and its instruments the police, brought and held them together.

In the 1950s the Commonwealth government adopted a wider, more clearly articulated assimilation policy. As Paul Hasluck, Minister for Territories, explained: 'Assimilation means, in practical terms, that, in the course of time, it is expected that all persons of Aboriginal blood or mixed blood in Australia will live like White Australians do.'¹⁰ A process of 'cultural adjustment' was to occur. This was the long-awaited 'new deal' for Aborigines, and certainly more was spent on Western-style education, training and health. While some of these opportunities may have been an improvement, the policy was premised on the notion that Aborigines must be taught



A propaganda photograph for the 1950s assimilation policy.

Aboriginal families were expected to behave and look like an idealised white Australian suburban household, so as to become indistinguishable from the bulk of the community.



The Aboriginal Tent Embassy, outside Parliament House, Canberra, erected in 1972. This drew attention to the fact that Aborigines have never been officially recognised, respected or compensated as the original landowners of Australia. A new wave of political activities was complemented by a massive cultural revival and a new pride as a people.

to abandon their 'backward' ways. This was a time when many rural Aborigines in southern states were forced to move into towns and cities. Children were removed from parents. A few Aborigines were allowed 'exemptions' from black status, and granted citizenship rights, if they agreed to follow a 'Western' lifestyle, and not associate with their tribal relations. The message was clear: Aboriginal culture was bad, and to be shunned. The policy caused divisions within families; the elders were afraid to pass on important knowledge in case it harmed their children's prospects. The cultural and psychological damage of this phase has not yet been fully assessed.

The multiculturalism of recent decades has brought respectability to ethnic and, by extension, Aboriginal difference. The Aborigines, in reacting against the assimilation policy, were to some degree influenced by decolonisation in Africa and Asia and by black civil rights movements in the United States. The example of other coloured peoples' rebellion against Western imperialism has, since the 1970s, encouraged an Aboriginal cultural resurgence, especially in the cities. Aboriginal identity and survival are now emphasised by the black community, as epitomised by the large, peaceful gathering of Aborigines from all over Australia which was held in Sydney to coincide with the Bicentennial Australia Day celebrations. Aborigines welcomed their non-Aboriginal guests as they demanded the rights and recognition of a people in occupation for over two hundred Bicentenaries. Most of all, they celebrated the survival of cultural pride and identity for the past two hundred years.

Aboriginal culture has been changed by the British, European and Asian migrant cultures. Yet, although many Aborigines now live 'Western' lifestyles, a sense of cultural integrity remains, especially a sense of historical unity as Australia's colonised people. Cultural resistance, especially as it is embodied in the traditions passed on to their younger generation, is central to the continuing struggle against colonialism.

The Aboriginal people were transplanted against their will. This forced migration was generally designed not to consolidate or improve their culture's chances, but to break up and destroy it because of its supposed backwardness. Economic motives, racial ideology, and above all, a colonising mentality, made this possible. In addition to the violence and neglect which killed thousands of Aborigines, concerted attacks were waged on the cultural front; they focused on the land, family and personal values which formed the basis of Aboriginal culture.

ABORIGINAL AUSTRALIA AND A TRANSPLANTED CULTURE

So, how, if at all, could Aborigines have influenced Europeans in Australia, and thus made an impact on their culture? The general assumption that Aboriginal culture has not influenced the wider Australian culture is as difficult to prove as it is to disprove.

As poet Les Murray has written, 'In Australian civilisation... convergence between black and white is a fact, a subtle process, hard to discern often, and hard to produce evidence for... it lacks the force of fashion to drive it'.¹¹ More critical readings of historical sources will show that Aboriginal culture has had an undeniable impact on Australia as a nation. From the first settlements, Aboriginal tracks were used as roads. Aborigines also often shared their knowledge with the Europeans. They showed newcomers edible plants and animals, and wells were sunk where Aborigines pointed out water supplies. Without their assistance, many whites would have perished.

It seems the peculiarly Australian sense of humour might be influenced by Aborigines. First Fleet writers such as Collins repeatedly remarked on what Aborigines saw as funny, how they mimicked people's characteristics, how trackers joked hilariously when uncomfortable in unfamiliar territory. The Territory folk singer, Ted Egan, has observed the continuing impact on bush humour. The earthiness, strong visual elements and animal metaphors of the best yarn-spinners may well derive from Aboriginal humour. Aborigines were forced into the role of the king's fool by white Australians, who expected them to be amusing. But while Aborigines were often portrayed as comic by colonial cartoonists and painters, their expert mimicry of influential white men was not to make the clown a figure of fun so much as to satirise the pretensions of the dominant culture. Aborigines obtained many laughs out of the peculiarities of Europeans.

The bush legend and the pioneer legend which were created to provide a distinctive Australian past for non-Aborigines, grew out of an awareness of historical and geographical dislocation from the mother country and a concomitant need to find a permanent identity in the new landscape. Such legends are revealing of self-perceptions and cultural ideals. This ostensibly radical nationalism purported to sever symbolically the umbilical tie to Mother England, but it argued its case within a British framework and without abandoning the British inheritance. Patriarchal white Australia thus forged its sense of manhood by artificially asserting a claim to rightful continuity in the alien landscape.

While Aborigines always had their ancient legends, they also created new ones to explain more recent happenings, as shown in the Captain Cook sagas, stories of the archetypal 'first white man' to appear in different regions. Representing a range of Europeans in one man, he travels in a sailing ship, taking land greedily and violently, without properly negotiating for it, and is judged as highly immoral according to the precepts of Aboriginal law.¹²

White Australia's national legends were aimed at giving Europeans a positive identification with the recent colonial past. The pioneer legend achieved this more comfortably than the bush legend, for here white families brought a model of civilisation into a harsh landscape where the obstacles they battled include drought, fire, flood and 'hostile' Aborigines. They did not attempt to come to terms with their position

as colonisers. The reasons for Aboriginal hostility were rarely elaborated, and the Aboriginal battle to protect and hold onto their traditional lands was ignored. Unfamiliar dangers somehow ennobled white migrants, but their actions in 'taming the frontier' was something for which only non-Aboriginal future generations can be grateful.

While it is agreed that Russel Ward's influential book, *The Australian Legend*, published in 1958, tended to ignore white brutality against Aborigines, no-one has commented on the positive role of the Aborigines in shaping the legend itself. Their presence is underplayed, both as a resistance force, and as workers in the pastoral industry. They worked alongside the white proletariat, and were a noticeable feature of the labour force throughout almost every rural district of Australia. Aborigines were employed and had a reputation for excellence as shearers, horse-riders, stockworkers, and in a wide variety of associated station and farm work.

The main purpose of *The Australian Legend* was to lend historical authority to the legend of the 1880s and 1890s, and hence to canonise the noble white bushman. Ward's description of the 'typical Australian' closely resembles characteristics of Aboriginal culture which are easily observable by Europeans; he was 'practical', a great improviser, a critic of affectation, capable of great exertion, but feeling 'no impulse to work hard without good cause, usually taciturn rather than talkative, one who endured stoically rather than who acted busily'. Other attributes paralleled the most outstanding characteristics of Aboriginal society: he was also egalitarian, hospitable, and 'a rolling stone, highly suspect if "he" should chance to gather much moss'.

As though to reinforce all this, Ward glorified the noble bushmen as 'the Nomad Tribe'. It is thus possible that, by following the myth-makers of the 1890s, he forged an identity for white Australian men by borrowing from Aboriginal identity. Like the earlier writers, in searching for something distinctive, he might have found the Aboriginal — without fully realising what he was about. Whether this was a conscious or unconscious device, a legend or a reality, it is indelibly part of our cultural history.

Despite a considerable body of criticism, no-one has explored the local derivativeness of the legend. While commentators have noted the influence of Western idealisation of the bush in response to city 'squalor', especially the 'Frontier Thesis' of the American Frederick Jackson Turner, no-one has yet recognised that the stereotypes of the true Australian seem to be taken from Aboriginal culture. Though this has undoubtedly been a national 'blindspot', it might also represent some sort of unconscious synthesis. If any credence is to be given to the arguments about the importance of the frontier and the outback for Australian identity, then it is logical that, as the main bush-dwellers, Aborigines had a disproportionate influence on that identity.

The Australian frontier was not only the site for cultural interchange and co-operation, but also for a conflict between

the indigenous people and the white invaders. The Bush Legend should thus contain some reference to this war. Ward argues that, with the 'virtual absence of a warlike aboriginal race', mateship developed out of the needs of the homogeneous European population. Aboriginal women's partnerships with white bushmen are underplayed, though Ward dismissively mentions that they helped keep sodomy out of mateship. While admitting that the bushmen were racist, he also maintained that, once Aborigines ceased to be physically threatening, they were portrayed as victims of the alien lords and capitalists. The Aboriginal woman 'Black Alice' thus features in the Sam Holt ballad by 'Ironbark' or Gibson.

Ward is not blind to the contradictions of his stance, or of the bushman's position. For the legend to work, the white man, not the indigenes, must be primarily seen as the colonised group. Some of these bushmen did, however, hint at a sense of indebtedness to Aborigines. They may not have allowed them into their ranks, but felt themselves 'heirs to important parts of aboriginal culture'. Ward does not go as far as saying that Aborigines excelled white men at skills such as horse-breaking or cattle-mustering, and he does not point out how many white people owed their lives to Aboriginal bushcraft. But Ward argues that 'no white man has ever been the equal of the Aborigines in essential bush skills, in tracking, finding water, living on bush food, and so on'. In apparent contradiction to his overall position, he concludes: 'If... the bushman's esprit de corps sprang largely from his adaption to, and mastery of, the outback environment, then the Aboriginal was his master and mentor'.¹³ Unfortunately in the later argument of *The Australian Legend* it is the environment alone, not the bushmen's Aboriginal mentors, which stands as his creative hero.

For urban dwellers, the white bushman thus replaced the black 'noble savage' as the main image of the Australian wilderness. The 1986 film, *Crocodile Dundee*, gave the legend a more individualistic ethic. The changing treatment of the bush legend says much about the changing Australia.

EUROPEAN ASSIMILATION

From the earliest white settlement, British men who chose to live with Aborigines were regarded as unintelligent and uncivilised. The state never endorsed European attempts to assimilate Aboriginal culture. Male convicts, who escaped their inhumane treatment in the gulag and joined up with Aboriginal groups, adapted quite easily to their new lifestyle and acquired wives and families. The most famous example was William Buckley, who lived with Port Phillip Aborigines for thirty-two years. But the authorities saw these men as a security threat and, indeed, Port Jackson escapees, Wilson and Knight, led Aboriginal raids on white settlers. Little is known of the convict women who were integrated by Aborigines, though men like Lieutenant Collins were repulsed by the thought of their predicament. In the early twentieth century, Daisy Bates' decision to live with central Australian Aborigines provoked controversy.

Thousands of white men have lived in relationships with Aboriginal women. Sometimes these were highly exploitative, but in many instances the associations were endorsed by the women's Aboriginal husbands or other relations. Such families promised a convergence of the cultures. They defied the dominant ideology, and consequently governments and the white population generally interfered to prevent it occurring. In the Northern Territory, white men who lived with Aboriginal women were classed as 'comboes', and from 1918 such liaisons were illegal. Men like Alfred Anderson of Seven Emus station were refused permission by the Chief Protector of Aborigines to marry their Aboriginal de facto wives. Although such unions were common, open acknowledgement led to social ostracism by the white community. Relations with 'part-Aboriginal' women were another matter, as such unions were thought to 'water down' the Aboriginal blood in the population.¹⁴

Across Australia, men who lived with Aboriginal women were often scorned, and consequently white fathers refused to acknowledge their coloured children. Such intermixing was considered harmful to the white race, and the children that resulted were taught to feel their outcast status. They might attempt to make them disown their parents by calling them 'dirty blacks', but they were not accepted as 'white' themselves. The colonial and state governments used a variety of methods in handling the so-called 'half-caste problem'. In Victoria from 1886, children and adults of mixed descent were taken off reserves and forcibly absorbed into the white population. From the 1920s until the 1960s in New South Wales, children, like Margaret Tucker, were separated from their parents and compelled to become servants in white households. Unlike white women, Aboriginal women were not encouraged to reproduce: their children were taken from them, and they were not entitled to the baby bonus. Despite all the government interference, sexual unions across the race barriers continued, and more children were born, creating a merging of the two peoples, and the two cultures.

While the majority of Australian literary movements paid no attention to Aborigines, a group known as the Jindyworobaks consciously drew upon their culture in an attempt to forge an authentic national identity. From the late 1930s to late 1950s, with Rex Ingamells as their leading light, they published a series of anthologies. Jindyworobak meaning to 'join and annex', was taken from the glossary of James S. Devaney's *The Vanishing Tribes*, a collection of Aboriginal stories gathered from elders, which served to inspire the movement. They wanted to create a unique Australian poetry, free of 'alien influences' such as European classical or Greek imagery, and believed their themes and motifs could be derived from Aboriginal culture. Their aims included 'a clear recognition of environmental values', and 'an understanding of Australia's history and traditions, primaeval, colonial and modern'.

Craving a more unified and continuous relationship between people and land, they recognised Australia's ancient non-European heritage, and, through 'annexing' it, hoped to promote a total, less disjointed Australian identity. As well as attempting

to come to terms with the major part played by Aborigines in Australia's history, their vision also incorporated the post-1788 and 'modern' periods.

The Jindys wanted to come to terms with the unique Australian landscape, which many Australians still regarded as alien. But they rejected the fashion of contemporary poetry which glorified the settlers' struggles for mastery over land. Aboriginal relationships with land provided them with a sustaining symbolism. Some wanted more than metaphors: they hoped to personally absorb these values, and so attain an authentic psychological continuity with the landscape.

The close relationships of Aborigines with their land, provided a unifying cosmology. Humans on the surface of the landscape were linked with a never-ending present, with bird and animal life. Topographical features provided the individual and the group with a fully integrated sense of place and community. Everyone was linked with the original creation-time, which happened in Australia, not in the northern hemisphere. The Jindys tried to adapt the 'timeless verities' of this indigenous spirit of place.

In the late 1940s, the Jindys were often trivialised and dismissed by critics for purely racist reasons. Why, they asked, should European Australians borrow from a degraded, dying race? What can British civilisation learn from barbarism and savagery, from 'a narrow culture', 'a backward people... without a written language', 'an exotic dogma' with 'no relevance', a remote Aboriginal culture on the point of extinction? For such pundits the call to take up black values had no place in White Australia; other colonial nations, like South Africa, did not have to borrow from Kaffir culture to create their unique literature. A.D. Hope and F.T. Macartney referred to the Jindys as 'a Boy Scout School of poetry', and accused them of 'playing Indians'. Their supposedly 'boyish' quest was in fact an attempt to gain, through poetry, a sense of personal and national adulthood. As Brian Elliott, anthologist of the movement, wrote: 'We enter a mythological world, but it is our own: we take possession of a magic that is our own. We are initiated men'.

The Jindys' insights into Aboriginal mythology were mainly drawn from central Australian groups. T.G. Strehlow, a missionary's son brought up alongside the Aranda and fluent in their language, had called for white Australians to draw upon their dreamtime — alchera or alcheringa — for national inspiration. The Jindys agreed that this offered the logical beginning for all Australian imaginative life.

While most of the Jindy poets derived their understandings of these teachings from books written by white men, others, such as Ian Mudie, reflected on their personal observations of Aborigines in country towns. Roland Robinson was one of the few who actually worked in the bush in the 1950s and 1960s, and spent time with the elders collecting myths and legends for a wider public.

The Jindys were backward-looking; they created a golden age, a pre-industrial world which seemed simpler and where metaphysics explained daily events. It was about a tradition

which had disappeared and was being reclaimed. There was no apparent interest in portraying the contemporary Aborigine who was compromised by contact with Western culture. Nevertheless the movement did have political implications; Ingamells was interested in Aboriginal rights, and during the 1930s was involved in the Australia First movement. The poets, however, agreed that the 'present appearances' of Aboriginal culture were 'unhelpful'. Mudie also saw colonial Australia as a destructive force.

The poets — the story-tellers, the myth-makers, the corroboree-makers — would be failing in their purpose if they allowed the post-aboriginal national scene to remain unpopulated, to be devoid of cult-heroes, just because disease, destruction, greed, violence, and a spirit alien to our environment, arrived on these shores a hundred and sixty years ago.

In supposedly 'rescuing' Aboriginal culture, the Jindys often misunderstood the real basis of that culture. While Mudie described the use of Aboriginal symbolism as a poetic 'instrument', and Hart-Smith as a 'device of the mind', it was also used in a metaphysical sense: to create a new religion of land-worship in a troubled and increasing secular society. A white version of site-magic would make the land sacred for Europeans as well as Aborigines.

These pseudo-religious intentions were a form of sentimental nationalism rather than anti-colonialism. On the one hand, they prompted a wider public to take more notice of Aboriginal culture and exposed the beauty of Aboriginal spirituality. On the other hand, they adopted Aboriginal terms and concepts incomprehensible and alienating to most readers. The Jindyworobaks were not poets of genius, and their themes were isolationist and rural. They did not integrate their mission with the reality of a racist and predominantly urban white Australia.¹⁵

Their failure to consider the politics of their cause was a serious shortcoming. Since they were absorbed by the aesthetic, their debunkers could mock the grandeur/nobility of Aboriginal culture, and refer to it as the culture of a decaying and dying race. If the Jindyworobaks had worked out a clearer political purpose, they may have been better equipped to defend their position.

The Jindys intentionally steered clear of contemporary issues because they were detrimental to their 'golden age' vision of noble man living in harmony with nature. They took little interest in urban Aborigines, and found the spiritual heart of Aboriginality in the 'traditional' people of the desert. This reinforced static models of noble savages, unblemished by white influences. They were not interested in Aborigines who tried to annex or join up with European culture. This meant that they denied Aborigines the very privilege they sought from them.

In seeking to unify pre-colonial and post-colonial history, they tried to find continuity in a discontinuous past by creating something as timeless as the dreaming. The essential problem, however, was that it was a poetic fantasy. It had its cultural value, but the reality of Australian history was different. Europeans had, almost from the outset, rejected Aboriginal culture and denied its influences; the government policy was one of assimilation, which was aimed at creating white blackfellows, not black whitefellows.

Nevertheless, the Jindyworobaks represented a brave step towards achieving a cultural convergence. The fact that they were idealistic enough to believe it possible was itself a great leap towards cultural exchange. Novelists also grappled with the problems of white/black relations and a sense of place. Published in 1929, Katharine Susannah Prichard's *Coonardoo* was the first novel to portray an Aboriginal woman as a heroine; its publication increased public sensitivity to the plight of Aborigines. Xavier Herbert's *Capricornia*, published in the Sesqui-centennial Year of 1938, had a larger impact by drawing to public attention the continuing racism and brutality of European settlement, as epitomised on the northern frontier. As cultural historian Bernard Smith wrote

What Herbert and Prichard best grasped was that at the heart of the Australian experience lay a sexual tragedy of enormous historical dimension in which love, mockery and hatred battled for the mastery, and that the tragedy was performed across the bodies of Aboriginal women.

As Herbert wrote, part-Aboriginal girls were seen from birth as a 'great dirty joke'.

Herbert at first, in emphasising race and class oppression, did not pay attention to the spiritual side of Aboriginal life. However he subsequently developed this aspect in *Poor Fellow My Country*, published in 1975, and elements of its nationalist theme in many ways parallel some of the fundamental aims of the Jindyworobak movement. His friendships with different Aboriginal people enhanced his insights into their culture, and through this novel he was able to achieve much more than the Jindys.

Jeremy Delacey, the hero of *Poor Fellow My Country*, epitomises a conscious cultural convergence. He dedicates himself to getting to know the land through learning from Aborigines. He draws upon their culture for what he respects in it. Jeremy lives with an Aboriginal woman, Nanago, whom he loves deeply. Jeremy is conscripted by a new nationalist party as the prototype of the 'true Australian', because of his knowledge of the Australian bush and Aboriginal culture. But his involvement in urban politics only ruins him. The exceptionally talented, physically beautiful but strange child, Prindy, is an alternative example of convergence. He is of dual descent, and, although tutored in European music and literature, yearns

to find his 'Rown Road' and be initiated into Aboriginal manhood. The foolishness of Europeans almost leads to his death, and the violence of the landscape almost swallows him up several times. His survival ability enhances his god-like status, but he can never avoid the bitter tensions of being caught between two worlds. One of his most sensitive supporters, Jeremy, ends up causing his death when he interferes at a vital moment in an Aboriginal man-making ceremony.¹⁶

The contemporary poet, Les Murray, perceptively integrates Aboriginal insights into his work. He grew up on the north coast of New South Wales, the country of the Kattang people. In 'The Human-Hair Thread' Murray argued that the Jindy-worobaks were on the right track in their concept of '*environmental value*, of the slow moulding of all people within a continent or region towards the natural human form which that continent or region demands...' Of his own poetry, he wrote: 'I want my poems to be more than just National Parks of sentimental preservation. What I am after is a spiritual change that would make them unnecessary.'¹⁷

CULTURAL TOURISM

In a search for something uniquely or recognisably Australian, European artists have also drawn upon Aboriginal motifs and themes. In the 1940s, an artist of Polish Jewish background, Yosl Bergner, took a major interest in depicting Aborigines in an urban environment. He noted many parallels between his own people's dispossession and that of the Aborigines. Roy Dalgarno adopted Aboriginal tribal images after his stay in the Northern Territory during World War II. In the 1950s Studio Anna produced a wide variety of ceramic souvenirs for the local and overseas market which interpreted and adapted north Queensland and central Australian Aboriginal designs.

From the 1930s to 1960s, Aboriginal figures and designs became common motifs. 'Cute little picaninny' paintings and prints were popular and Aborigines featured on ashtrays, paintings, and tea towels. An Aboriginal doll was available in the 1950s, but never achieved the popularity of the golliwog. Australian storybooks such as the *Digit Dick* series of the 1940s featured kind Aborigines who befriended lost white children in the bush. In one story set in Tasmania, Digit Dick met the lonely spirit of Truganini which was a poignant, though exciting, adventure for him.



Aboriginal stockman ashtray and Studio Anna ceramics, 1960. Aboriginal motifs have been used to symbolise a distinctly Australian identity, especially for tourist souvenirs.

From the 1940s Aboriginal art exhibitions in capital cities drew wider attention to their cultural artefacts, and gradually they began to be valued and appropriated as 'art'. Aborigines were not initially keen to market their culture; they had no barter or exchange system which could be easily incorporated into the Western economy. Since the 1950s, Aboriginal painting and artefacts have been marketed in a more sophisticated way and are being recognised alongside Western art. Today they are achieving more prominence in art galleries rather than purely in ethnographic museums and Aboriginal artists are gaining increasing international recognition. Aboriginal attitudes to art and artefact sales have changed, and in the 1980s the Aboriginal Arts Board has achieved fairer terms for producers. Many communities now rely on such sales for cash income.

Nineteenth century missions such as Lake Tyers attracted tourists eager to see 'real' Aborigines and hunt for souvenirs. They gawked at Aborigines, who embarrassed the tourguides by asking for money. Aborigines along railway lines also conducted tourist enterprises, exchanging artefacts and women for cash or goods. At La Perouse in Sydney, both before and after World War II, they manufactured and sold boomerangs, shell art and other objects to tourists.

Aborigines are now controlling tourist enterprises on their own lands, most notably at Uluru and Kakadu in the Northern Territory. In the 1980s, it is possible to have an Aboriginal introduction to the landscape's history and meaning. Many Aborigines still prefer to avoid the white tourists; Uluru people describe them as 'crazy ants' because of their appearance when they rush about at peakhour on 'sunset strip', and especially when they climb Ayers Rock.¹⁸

CONCLUSION

The preceding discussion of some aspects of convergence, like the alternative history, is one of paradoxes. In the real story, the transplanted and dislocated British and their descendants waged a campaign to dislodge, dislocate and transplant the Aboriginal people who had a long historical association with the Australian continent. Through warfare, protection, preservation and assimilation policies, they tried to render Aboriginal culture alien in its own country.

Newcomers might be expected to learn about and adapt to the existing laws of the land and its people. Certainly Aborigines expected, and continue to expect this of white Australians. Moreover it is important to remember that, despite the conquerors' inability to acknowledge its role, Aboriginal culture has certainly contributed significantly to the making of Australian culture. Some would argue that it is the only truly Australian culture.

Co-operation between the two cultures should not be dismissed as an outlandish notion. For too long this view of cultural convergence has been used as an excuse to ignore its possibilities. The past must be measured against a new yardstick, a new less materialistic Australian dream: a dream

of positive interaction that could lead to peaceful co-existence and mutual respect, to cultural sharing and exchange, to dual land ownership and management, and ultimately to an equitable coming together of two peoples. Bernard Smith has defined convergence' as 'a relationship in which identities are maintained and even developed, but relationships become more complex and fruitful, and beneficial to Australian culture as a whole'.¹⁹

There are now a number of activities where Aborigines and Europeans collaborate in the spirit of convergence. At Uluru National Park, where Aboriginal owners manage the reserve in conjunction with the Parks authority, they willingly negotiate compromises, and share their knowledge among the wider public, who must visit on their terms, respecting their sacred places and values.

A longer established tradition of mutual co-operation and coexistence can be found in the Northern Territory cattle industry. During the first half of the twentieth century, Aborigines absorbed European culture into their own and used the cattle industry to fulfill their own cultural priorities. They worked for Europeans in order to stay on their own land and look after its sacred sites. Cattle stations became community bases and meeting places, central to a new Aboriginal social identity which valued horseriding and stockwork skills as part of a changed definition of manhood. The traditional bush economy survived alongside the new cattle economy, and a rich ritual life continued throughout the year, but to fit in with station routines, especially during the 'wet' or slack season. A mutual respect often developed between the 'mullaka' or boss and the Aboriginal community. Because of his total dependence on this workforce, the European station manager had to understand and adapt to Aboriginal demands. And so, when they required it, he had to allow key workers to leave for 'Aboriginal business'. The Elsey Aborigines taught managers, such as E. Thonemann, the local languages and explained their religious beliefs to them.

Aborigines often invited the bosses to corroborees and ceremonies. They also incorporated them into their kinship networks by allotting a 'skin' classification, which defined their obligations to all members of the community. Wives were also promised to them, and they were expected to fulfill fixed duties to her family. On more isolated stations, they brought up their children, and men like H. Bathern, trained them so that when they inherited the station they were properly equipped to manage it. Other managers were brutally exploitative and insensitive to Aboriginal demands, but this was at their own peril. It is significant, however, that so many came to establish ways of living and working agreeable to both cultures. Some, like the Darceys of Mallapunyah, became so 'acculturated' that they acquired an Aboriginal style of speech and story-telling. They often found it very difficult to take part in 'white' society, without Aboriginal people living alongside them. The cultural exchanges created more family-oriented, Aboriginalised work arrangements and the promise of a form of cultural convergence.

Aborigines played a large role in shaping the character of northern bushcraft and animal management techniques. They thus developed a new Aboriginal cattle culture and a unique northern cattle culture.²⁰

Although conflict and destruction are the central themes of Australian history, more attention must be paid to cultural continuity, change, exchange, and transformation. Sexual relations between the two societies, and ensuing family relations deserve much more analysis, yet this is a topic usually swept under the carpet of collective white memory. Aborigines and Europeans may well learn much more from studying compromises which offered a hope of mutual respect and cultural exchange; such co-operative family and kin relationships might offer something more positive than further analysis of massacres.

From the Aboriginal perspective, poets like Oodgeroo Noonuccal (Kath Walker), Lionel Fogarty, and writers Colin Johnson, Eric Wilmot, Kevin Gilbert and Sally Morgan have played a crucial role in interpreting the meeting of the two cultures. Like the European visionaries such as the Jindyworobaks, they believe that European intruders must make concerted efforts to cease to be alien in their new environment. The gulf may be wide, but it is not too great to jump. If all Australians listen, they might be more at ease with the spirit of their land. There are risks and confusions in pursuing such a path, and those who attempt to interpret Aboriginal culture may be accused, perhaps justifiably, of trying to exploit or appropriate it for selfish motives. But, as Les Murray has wisely said, 'The ground of integration, of convergence, is apt to be rocky and ill-mapped'. It will need to be travelled and named, and sooner or later, all Australians will have 'to give some blood for dancing there'.²¹

NOTES

- 1 *In this bark painting Wainburranga depicts the arrival of the Australian white men in central Arnhem Land in about 1906. He recounts from the lore of his Rembarrnga people how the white men, who were probably driving cattle up to the Arafura Station, abused Aboriginal hospitality and how this led to violence and conflict.*

As the story goes, after his people had overcome their initial fears that the white men were ngayong or devil spirits — Aboriginal stockmen from the Roper River who accompanied the white men having reassured them on this point — they invited the strangers to attend a corroboree. The white men, leaving their guns behind, went to the corroboree ground, and their leader Mr Danby was given a place of honour near the singers.

In the middle of the corroboree the Europeans insulted their hosts by demanding to make free with their women. An Aboriginal elder then, having called on the women and

children to run into the bush and hide, seized an axe and hit Mr Danby on the forehead, badly injuring him. The Aborigines grabbed up their bundles of spears and sought sanctuary in the bush. Simultaneously the white men ran for their guns but by the time they returned to the corroboree ground all the Aborigines had vanished.

It is believed that after this incident the cattlemen adopted a 'shoot on sight' attitude towards Aborigines.

- 2 Geoffrey Serle, *From Deserts the Prophets Come: The Creative Spirit in Australia*, Melbourne, 1973; Donald Horne, *The Lucky Country*, Sydney 1965; Humphrey McQueen, *A New Britannia*, Melbourne, 1970; B. Spencer and F.J. Gillen, *Native Tribes of Central Australia*, London, 1899; W.E.H. Stanner, *After the Dreaming*, Sydney, 1969, pp.37 and 30-41; A.P. Elkin, *The Australian Aborigines*, Sydney, 1938.
- 3 W.K. Hancock, *Australia*, London, 1930, pp.11 and 234; J. Bonwick, *The First Twenty Years of Australia*, London, 1882, p.178; R.M. Crawford, *Australia*, London 1952, p.12; A.G.L. Shaw, *The Story of Australia*, London, 1967, p.17.
- 4 A. McGrath, 'Born in the Cattle': Aborigines in Cattle Country, Sydney, 1987, ch. 4; two outstanding autobiographies of Aboriginal women include S. Morgan, *My Place*, Perth, 1987 and E. Roughsey, *An Aboriginal Mother Tells of the Old and New*, Melbourne, 1984; Henry Reynolds, *The Other Side of the Frontier*, Townsville, 1981 and *Frontier*, Sydney, 1987.
- 5 Watkin Tench, *Sydney's First Four Years*, Sydney, 1961, pp.49 and 276; David Collins, *An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales*, Sydney, 1975, pp.303, 390 and 367; A. Atkinson and M. Aveling (eds), *Australians 1838*, Sydney, 1987; Bernard Smith, *European Vision and the South Pacific*, London, 1960, pp.126-139; Robert Dixon, *The Course of Empire: Neo-Classical Culture in New South Wales, 1788-1860*, Melbourne, 1986.
- 6 Hancock, p.224; C.D. Rowley, *Recovery: The Politics of Aboriginal Reform*, Melbourne, 1986, p.14.
- 7 H. Morgan, 'We should be proud of our history', *Age*, 5 September 1986; J.D. Lang, *Moreton Bay Courier*, 19 January 1856, cited in H. Reynolds, 'Racism in Australia: The legacy' in H. Mayer and H. Nelson (eds), *Australian Politics: A Fourth Reader*, Melbourne, 1978, p.217.
- 8 Collins, p.561; *New South Wales State Archives, Surveyor General, Letters to individuals and officials, 1822-28, reel 2821*; Wright is cited in notes by Rory Mungoven, 'What's in a name?', *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia*, Melbourne, 1897, pp.33-47; see also Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay*, London, 1987, p. 67 and ch. 2; also relevant is Tom Griffiths, 'Past silences:

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- 9 Cited in M. Clark, *A History of Australia*, Vol.5, Melbourne, 1981, p.65; A.T. Yarwood and M. Knowling, *Race Relations in Australia*, Melbourne, 1982, p.117; B. Attwood, *Blacks and Lohans: A study of Aboriginal-European relations in Gippsland in the nineteenth century*, PhD Thesis, La Trobe University, 1984; D. Barwick, 'And the lubras are ladies now' in F. Gale (ed.), *Women's Role in Aboriginal Society*, Canberra, 1978, pp.51-63.
- 10 McGrath, ch. 7; Cook cited in J.A. Carrodus Report, *Australian Archives*, CRS A1, 34/1002; P. Hasluck cited in S. Stone (ed.), *Aborigines in White Australia*, Melbourne, 1974, p.187; T. Rowse, 'Assimilation and after', A. Curthoys, A.W. Martin, T. Rowse (eds), *Australians from 1939*, Sydney, 1987.
- 11 Les A. Murray, 'The human hair thread', *Meanjin*, 36, 1977, p.569; B. Smith, *The Spectre of Truganini*, Sydney, 1980, pp.44-52; B. Smith, *The Death of the Artist as Hero*, Melbourne, 1988, ch. 26.
- 12 D. Bird Rose, 'The saga of Captain Cook: Morality and European law', *Australian Aboriginal Studies*, 2, 1984, pp.34-5.
- 13 R. Ward, *The Australian Legend*, Melbourne, 1958, pp.2, 97-9 and 200-201; see also *Historical Studies*, 18, October, 1978.
- 14 McGrath, pp.84-9.
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19 B. Smith, *Truganini*, p.50.

20 McGrath.

21 Les Murray, *Meanjin*, p.571.

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SOCIETY AND THE LANGUAGE OF CLASS

TERRY IRVING



'Common as dirt but plenty of money and friend' by Patrick Cook. Three themes in one: 'their' class structure (the Butler) and 'ours' (the Plutocrat); the evaluative role of class; and wealth as the basis of differentiation.