

## AUSTRALIAN STUDIES SYMPOSIUM, JANUARY 1991

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Australia has been a "terra cognita" for English Philology students at Barcelona University ever since Professor Doireann MacDermott initiated the discipline of Australian Studies here some fourteen years ago. Since then, the course content has been widened to include other areas of the world that, like Australia, were once colonies of Great Britain. Australia thus holds a special place in the Commonwealth Studies programme at Barcelona University today; for beyond its intrinsic interest, it represents both the point of departure and the driving force that has led us towards further explorations and discoveries.

Seen in this light, therefore, announcing the January 1991 symposium as "Primeras Jornadas de Estudios Australianos en Barcelona" was in fact a misnomer. What prompted the organizers to make the choice they did was the desire to find a title that would attract potential Australianists around Spain (we took it for granted that Spanish colleagues in the field would bring their support), and one that sounded wide enough so as not to deter newcomers from participating. And in this sense the choice was a happy one. Furthermore, these "Primeras Jornadas" meant the first opportunity for many of our students to attend lectures given by "flesh and blood" Australian scholars; not to mention the contacts made between these scholars and their Spanish counterparts to discuss new ideas and forge fresh links for the continuing promotion of Australian studies in this country.

A selection of the symposium papers are now being edited in book form. What follows has been taken from the introductory pages to inform *BELLS* readers of the themes which receive full treatment by their authors in the forthcoming publication.

Addressing a Spanish readership, Carmen Arnáiz summarizes K. Allan's new speech act theory (*Linguistic Meaning*, 2 vols. London: RKP, 1986) in which the Monash University professor has elaborated upon work done by other linguists to offer what Arnáiz considers possibly the most complete and coherent study on the subject to have been published to date.

Arnáiz points out, however, that while the author analyzes exhaustively for the sake of clarification and interpretation, especially where Indirect Speech Acts are concerned, his study can shed little new light on the question of linguistic universals since it focusses solely on the internal workings of English-speaking societies and their language. Notwithstanding, Arnáiz concludes by emphasising the important point made by R. Turner (*Ethnomethodology*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975) to the effect that attempts to explain certain linguistic phenomena will always encounter the same universal problem: that arising from man's lack of understanding of the workings of the human mind.

In essence, this is the problem Anthony Pym returns to in his article. As a translator of Australian literature he has asked: "How much of Australia fits into Spain?" assuming that what "fits" is everything that can be translated and that what does not are culture-bound items like, say, "drover" or "Gs", terms resisting translation because inexistent in the target culture. If this constitutes a problem for all translators, Pym tackles it vigorously as attested by part of his article subtitled: "Ten examples of minor lacunae encountered when translating Australian texts into Spanish" (a perusal of which also reveals Pym as an exponent of Australian humour).

Yet the thrust of his article has less to do with those "minor lacunae" the conscientious translator will endeavour to and usually does overcome, than with the larger question of ethical responsibility towards the receiver of the target language text. If the translator's culture has forgotten or ignores much about itself, Pym asks, must the translator likewise forget and ignore?

How "ignorance functions as part of being an Australian", to quote Pym, is also a point raised by Geoffrey Doyle. Looking at the way the Vietnam War has been represented in Australian popular culture, Doyle writes that for most Australians, including, remarkably, the veterans themselves, Vietnam is the uniquely American affair as portrayed in the cinema and television material imported from the U.S.A.

Doyle goes on to explain the striking difference manifested between the aims of one country and the other when Australia represented its own Vietnam experience by means of two television mini-series in 1987. Whereas the American media gurus, particularly those of the last decade, have been bent on "re-writing" Vietnam through a process of reintegrating the veteran into mainstream American society, and, more importantly, rehabilitating thereby the U.S.A.'s military image, the Australian series revealed their veteran as an embarrassment to the image of the "natural fighting man" of the glorious Anzac tradition.

What for Doyle pointed to a possible "new version of the Anzac mythology" was an incident at the conclusion of a veterans' march in Sydney later the same year. On that occasion, the figure of the Australian soldier as "the shattered veteran who dared to survive" finally touched his countrymen's hearts and appeared to be on the way to winning his rightful place in the collective memory.

But such acceptance was to prove short lived. Doyle relates that in the years following 1987 there have been attempts at media and ministerial levels to integrate the Vietnam experience into the Anzac legend, to override the "dismembering realities" by recalling the Anzac spirit of the past, as in Hawke's 1990 speech celebrating Gallipoli in which he reminded Australians of "the courage, mateship and above all the willingness to be a sacrifice to the nation."

In the final analysis, Doyle's article is a plea for the "dismembering realities" not to be forgotten; if they are, he concludes, Australians might well be prone to serving the wrong causes again.

One way to prevent a recurrence of this sort of thing might be to revise the myths and legends from a woman's point of view, as does Kate Schaffer in her critical work *Women and the Bush* (Sydney: CUP, 1988), or Kate Grenville in her latest novel *Joan Makes History* (St Lucia: UQP, 1988). Nor are these women writers isolated cases, as Schaffer's article shows. Surveying the work of female colleagues in the area

of post-structuralist criticism, she notes their radical departure from a literary tradition that has endured since the 19th century. Informing this tradition is the legend of the "bushman-as-hero", a genuine Australian creation "[whose] voice asserts the nation's sense of its difference from the parent culture."

Needless to say, the radical departures now being taken by certain Australian women writers involve more than uncovering truths that will serve to demolish myths and legends constructed by Australian men. That women's goals reach farther is implicit in Schaffer's pointing out for us that it was a male critic who first acknowledged that the "bush myth" had been created by male urban writers, artists and critics in collaboration with the *Bulletin*, a literary magazine of the late 19th century which became "a mouthpiece for the liberal urban bourgeois against the interests of the rural pastoralists."

Just where women writers opting for a radical departure intend to arrive is indicated by Urbano Viñuelo during his discussion of Kate Grenville's *Joan Makes History*. After remarking on the double-edged irony of the authorial warning concerning "historical inaccuracies" and her having used "real historical events only when it suited [her] purpose," Viñuelo concludes that Grenville has but one purpose in mind --namely, to subvert the role of the male, whose past protagonism has negated the role of the female in the shaping of Australia's history.

But if *Joan Makes History* constitutes a work of audaciously sustained irony, the reader is not left with the feeling that Grenville has produced a version of Australia's past from a radical stance that now proves to be equally biased in turn. For despite its fictional frames and its confessed "historical inaccuracies", Grenville's text serves not only to give real roles to women but also to acknowledge the existence of Aboriginal peoples in the context of Australian history.

For background reading to my article on Aboriginal playwright Jack Davis, I consulted works by the historian Henry Reynolds and the writer-critic Mudrooroo Narogin (Colin Johnson) in which Aboriginal realities, so far largely written out of the pages of Australian history books, according to Reynolds, are made starkly explicit by Narogin, so that in effect both writers are stating the need to redress the imbalance between Australia's "official" history, written by whites, and the history of her indigenous peoples who, steeped in an oral tradition and long denied the benefits of education, have only very recently begun to make their mark on the Australian writing scene.

These writers are committed to bringing the truths of the Aboriginal experience to the attention of white readers in a language that these readers will understand. Indeed, Jack Davis once confessed that he intended his writing to hurt. Yet in studying his plays and in evaluating comments he has made elsewhere, I have felt that he intends not only to shake white Australians out of ignorance and complacency, but also to invite Aboriginals to examine attitudes that allow them to blame the white man for everything and reject all responsibility for themselves.

While forward-looking people like Jack Davis understand the futility of subscribing to what Edward Said has called "the politics of blame", the fact remains that Australia has inherited a legacy of brutality from her European ancestors. The Aboriginals and the land they had guarded for 50,000 years were to be decimated and

devastated within the short period of time following the arrival of the first white men. Motivated by profit and greed, these newcomers initiated a process which Doireann MacDermott describes in her article as "the unmaking of an ecology". Spelling out for us the effects of this process on the indigenous people, flora and fauna, MacDermott laments the changes so rapidly wrought on "a harmonious ecosystem with just the right number of humans, birds and beasts for what that tired old continent could sustain."

In spite of all, MacDermott sees hope in the fact that Australia today is vigilant and the country in the vanguard of the struggle against further ecological destruction. Perhaps we may infer from this that important lessons have been learned and are still there to be learned from the wisdom of an ancient people that have managed to survive the onslaught of civilization.

If we pause for a moment to revise the themes that have been mentioned so far, we note that an idea of marginality has become predominant. At first sight, this might seem to be no more than a curious coincidence, given that the Symposium title was open-ended. Yet on deeper reflection one comes to see that if marginality has informed subject matter as apparently diverse as war veterans, women, Aborigines and the environment, then there is obviously much need for the debate to be continued beyond the confines of a meeting in Barcelona or wherever. Manning Clarke said of Kate Grenville that "[she] is a writer who knows about the things that belong to eternity", which is another way of drawing attention to the importance of issues that have remained on the periphery of western societies' concerns for long enough.

Jacqueline Hurlley and Socorro Suárez also return to the issues raised by Australian women writers. For her article, Hurlley sought and found through the help of colleagues in Australia an unpublished play by Katharine Susannah Prichard. This play was first performed in Perth in 1937 and was to be neglected soon thereafter.

In her study of the manuscript, Hurlley perceives the writer's empathy with the families of Republicans during the Spanish Civil War years, people she had been amongst to witness their terrible "day-to-day suffering" augmented by their knowledge of the lack of solidarity on the part of other nations that nonetheless felt the formidable threat posed by Fascism.

Prichard actively supported the Republican cause by writing *Women of Spain*, the design of which, asserts Hurlley, "is the passionate determination to see the country free of bloodshed and economic oppression." The predominance of mother figures therein she sees as "indicative of [Prichard's] view of womanhood which sees women as childbearers"; and of the play's ending (reminiscent of the ending Jack Davis contrived for *Barungin*), Hurlley notes how "bitterly ironic" it becomes today when one has the benefit of hindsight.

Like Geoffrey Doyle at the conclusion of his article, Hurlley pleads for something not to be forgotten. Though making no "grand claim" for its literary value, she argues that *Women of Spain* should see publication because "it merits some attention in an assessment of the literary output related to the Spanish Civil War." Furthermore, she sees that its publication would be a way of helping to bring wider recognition of women's contributions to a field that has remained a male preserve for far too long.

In her discussion of a collection of short stories by Judy Duffy entitled *Bad Mothers*, Socorro Suárez identifies a different perspective on womanhood from the one Hurtle assigns to K.S. Prichard. Starting a writing career in middle age, Duffy goes beyond the childbearing function that is Prichard's idea of womanhood to centre her view on motherhood as a doomed role in that it extinguishes itself within a woman's lifetime.

Suárez underlines the fatalism already present in the title and which will pervade these stories wherein Duffy's mothers are seen as responsible for their own and their children's unhappiness when extreme situations result in the disruption of family life. Paradoxically, it is the "maternal altruism" shared by all mothers that predetermines their loneliness and suffering because, quotes Suárez, "...no matter whether they love with passion or restraint, are ever-present or turning a blind eye, [women] will always be labelled and feel themselves to be when the crunch comes 'Bad Mothers'".

The relevance of yet another title is pointed out by David Carter in his article on Judah Waten. Carter sees *Alien Son* as a title "perfectly judged" by Waten for his collection of short stories concerning the Jewish migrant experience. But apart from its intention to alert readers to the theme of alienation, the title suggests much more to Carter. For one thing, it connotes double alienation: the son is both inside and outside his community and is thus able to "share the alienation of his parents but is also alien to them"; for another, it provides a basis on which Carter rests his thesis that "it is this doubleness which 'invents' a position for the migrant writer within, or at least provisionally within, the field of Australian literature."

With Carter's tentatively situating the migrant writer within the context of Australian Studies, yet another important dimension is brought to the theme of marginality, which theme, as we remarked earlier, emerged in response to a "Call for Papers" that stipulated only that the papers should be representative of Australia.

Patrick White, whose death had occurred shortly before the Symposium, was acknowledged through various references to his contribution towards an understanding of Australia. Or of his understanding of human weakness, we should add, for the "fragmentation and chaos", which Aurora García pinpoints as the forces destroying Eddie in White's *The Twyborn Affair*, were forces receiving non-fictional treatment in the Gulf War being waged as our meeting progressed.