

**School of Communication and Cultural Studies**

**The Conundrum of the West:  
Reading the Novels of Nicholas Hasluck**

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the ways in which Nicholas Hasluck's novels have been read in the past, and to develop an alternative interpretation which takes into account all Hasluck's narratives, reading them through the framework of current trends in literary and cultural theory. Hasluck is a Western Australian writer whose work takes seriously, while at the same time parodies, the institutions of both Western Australia and Western society.

The initial section comprises three chapters, in which Hasluck's novels are read through the commonly used frameworks of the mystery-thriller genre and satire. The second part of the thesis, which covers four chapters, is a reading of Hasluck's narratives through the shift from modernism to postmodernism, drawing particularly on the work of theorists such as Linda Hutcheon, Michel Foucault and Brian McHale. This interpretation reveals how Hasluck's work increasingly uses the marginal, regional narratives of Western Australia to contest the mega-narratives of the West.

The significance of this thesis is twofold. Firstly, this is currently the most in-depth examination of the work of a neglected Western Australian writer, and, secondly, the combining of Hasluck's literary themes and this thesis's critical framework provides a productive format for exploring issues of Western Australian history and literature.

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## Introduction

*But when the syllables  
and the gleaming phrases  
swing in over the side  
and flap upon the deck,  
let our minds descend  
to the deep sea bed;  
to the hard backed words  
we have not fished for yet.*  
(“Writer in Residence,” 60)

This thesis is an exploration of the work of Nicholas Hasluck (1942- ), a Western Australian writer. Although Hasluck has published several collections of poems and a book of short stories, this study focuses on the eight novels he has written to date. The concentration on the novels provides a progressive framework which is both manageable in size and consistent in literary form for the reading practices employed.

My initial reason for focussing on Hasluck’s novels was not due to a recognition of any unifying themes or literary features in his work, but simply to consider why these texts have been neglected. As my work progressed, the possibilities which were opened by different readings of these novels became more engrossing. The first reading of interest is that used by the literary critics who read Hasluck’s novels as mystery-thrillers. Exploring the thriller genre highlights various, useful patterns in the early Hasluck oeuvre, but it fails to incorporate satisfactorily all the eight novels published. Another reading, often mentioned by Hasluck himself, is that of satire. Satire offers a way of interpreting all the novels, especially through the categorising of the protagonists, but it does not provide an adequate basis for reading the wider cultural and theoretical issues raised in the narratives. Both the mystery-thriller and satire readings expounded in this thesis have been taken beyond the previous parameters of their application to Hasluck’s work.

However, the most significant and constructive reading of Hasluck's narratives which this thesis develops is the chronological interpretation, which incorporates all the works and provides a context for examining the issues they raise. This approach uses the shift in literary theory from modernism to postmodernism as a reading framework, for the novels sequentially parallel the literary-theoretical paradigms in their changing style and themes. The correlation, for example, is reflected through the transition of the narratives' themes from the universal to the regional. Inversely, the literary development and increasing regionalisation of Hasluck's work can be read as a metaphor for recent trends in Western society, as well as for cultural changes in the Western Australian and Australian literary scenes. Nevertheless, these same Western and Western Australian societal issues are also contested and disrupted in significant ways.

However, before focussing on these various interpretations of Hasluck's work, a major problem for the postmodern reader must be addressed – that is the position of the author. Due to the importance of this concern, some time will be spent addressing the topic of authorship and establishing a method for dealing with references to Hasluck, the man, the writer and the author.

### **The Position of the Author**

The problem with the position of the author is summed up by Roland Barthes' well-known statement, "the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author" ("The Death of the Author," 172). To Barthes, whose 1968 article brought the whole debate to prominence, the author is a modern concept derived from the individualism of capitalistic ideology. In ancient societies, narrative was not "created" by an author but mediated by a performer who did not claim to personally originate the story, but shared it through a performative and public ownership. By contrast, according to Barthes, those who believe in the presence of an Author describe him/her as nourishing "the book, which is to say that he exists before it, thinks, suffers, lives for it, is in the same relation of antecedence to his

work as a father to his child” (145). However, ascribing such an author-role to a single originary person “is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing” (147). The public “ownership” of the text is lost, and the sole interpretation is believed to lie with the Author. Barthes challenges this belief in an Author who is the text’s master subject.

Barthes also challenges the notion of the Critic, whom he sees as having the important task of discovering the Author . . . beneath the work: when the Author has been found, the text is ‘explained’ – victory to the critic. Hence there is no surprise in the fact that, historically, the reign of the Author has also been that of the Critic, nor again in the fact that criticism . . . is today undermined along with the Author. (147)

Notions of the Author and the Critic as transcendent interpreters are characteristic of the Leavisite tradition. Barthes rightly argues that both the transcendental Author and Critic seek to limit the interpretations of the text to a controlling hermeneutic of which they are the master. But, contends Barthes, the text has no one interpretation for

a text is not a line of words releasing a single ‘theological’ meaning . . . but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture. (146)

The multiple dimensions of the text mean that a hermeneutic site must be found which offers multiple, endless interpretations.

Barthes finds this site in the idea of the reader.

The reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text’s unity lies not in its origins but in its destination. Yet this destination cannot any longer be personal; the reader is without history, biography, psychology; he is simply that *someone* who holds together in a single field all the traces by which the written text is constituted. (148)

The reader alone, then, functions to interpret the many meanings of the text. The relationship of the reader to the text is, furthermore, defined as one of intertextuality. Linda Hutcheon, for example, commenting on Barthes and Riffaterre, sees intertextuality as replacing

the challenged author-text relationship with one between reader and text, one that situates the locus of textual meaning within the history of discourse itself. A literary work can actually no longer be considered original; if it were, it could have no meaning for its reader. It is only as part of prior discourses that any text derives meaning and significance. (*The Poetics of Postmodernism*, 126)

But the discussion on the reader as the interpreter of the text still leaves us with the question of the position and influence of the person who actually writes the text.

In dealing with the question of the writer, Barthes replaces the compromised construct of the Author with the notion of the “modern scriptor.”

In complete contrast [to the Author], the modern scriptor is born simultaneously with the text, is in no way equipped with a being preceding or exceeding the writing, is not the subject with the book as predicate; there is no other time than that of the enunciation and the very text is eternally written *here and now*. . . . For him, on the contrary, the hand, cut off from any voice, borne by a pure gesture of inscription (and not of expression), traces a field without origin – or which, at least, has no other origin than language itself, language which ceaselessly calls into question all origins. (145-46)

The scriptor, then is not a fixed, controlling master subject, but is a writer who can only imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original. His only power is to mix writings, to counter the ones with the others, in such a way as never to rest on any one of them. (146)

According to Seán Burke, in *Authorship: From Plato to the Postmodern*, Barthes’ concept of a modern scriptor reverts back to the medieval understanding of an author. In the medieval view, notes Burke, “the author (or *autor*) was the scriptor



through whom the Divine script was performed" ("Introduction," xvi). Referring to Barthes' passage on the modern scriptor quoted above, Burke claims: "We need only for 'language' substitute 'God' here to replicate precisely the dominant Medieval view of the *autor* . . . ." ("Introduction," xvii).<sup>1</sup> Thus, according to Burke, Barthes' concept of a scriptor is a return to a pre-transcendent, non-originary notion of the author.

Donald Pease, in "Author," also traces Barthes' concept of the scriptor back to pre-modern times, and shows how the modern scriptor is a return to the ancient counterpart who, rather than being a mere performer, is a culturally interactive site, speaking the already spoken. To Pease, it is Michel Foucault's writings about the author which reintroduces the culturally interactive aspect of the writer which had been lost through the reification of the author. In "What is an Author?" Foucault describes the writer in terms of the "author-function," asserting "the function of an author is to characterise the existence, circulation, and operation of certain discourses within a society" (124). The author's name, maintains Foucault, is functional in that it serves as a means of classification. A name can group together a number of texts and thus differentiate them from others. A name also establishes different forms of relationships among texts. . . . the fact that a number of texts were attached to a single name implies that relationships of homogeneity, filiation, reciprocal explanation, authentication, or of common utilisation were established among them. Finally, the author's name characterises a particular manner of existence of discourse. . . . [in that] its status and its manner of reception are regulated by the culture in which it circulates. (123)

The author's name, then, does not indicate a body of original work. Instead, according to Foucault, the unavoidable intertextuality of all texts means an author's name operates in a legal way to define and structure culturally-determined

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<sup>1</sup> In a commentary on Barthes' discourse on the death of the author, Seán Burke criticises Barthes for his "over-simple identification of God, man and author" ("Ideologies and Authorship," 217). Burke argues that like Barthes' modern scriptor the medieval scriptor has no power to originate, and the difference between them is the authority of one comes from language while the other's comes from God.

discourses which speak the already spoken.<sup>2</sup> Employing Foucault's understanding of the functioning of the author's name allows me in this thesis to look at the works of Nicholas Hasluck as a culturally-defined homogenous group and examine them in terms of current cultural discourses. The discourses will be examined by exploring a number of different ways in which the work can be read.

Several of the discourses which relate to Hasluck's work are discussed through the reading practices of critics. Pease claims that in spite of Barthes' linking the death of the Critic to the death of the Author, the critic has not died. Instead, just as the transcendent Author has been transformed into the scriptor or author-function, so, in practice, the transcendent Critic has been able to metamorphose from an interpreter of the "author" into an expert on the multiple dimensions of the text, and of the complex relationships in the practice of writing and reading.

It is the critic rather than the author or the reader who can render an authoritative account of the structure of the work, the internal relationships among the various textual strands and levels, and the shift from author to what Barthes names 'scriptor.' Without the author to demand the resolution of contradictory textual lines into an intended unity, the critic is free to reconstitute the text according to his own terms. (Pease, 272)

As with any criticism, however, none of the critics' readings of Hasluck's work is definitive or unitary in the sense that no particular reading encompasses all his texts, nor could any one reading reveal all their possible meanings.

Among these critics is Helen Daniel, who has written a number of reviews of Hasluck's novels; interviewed him for a critical response to his own work; as well

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<sup>2</sup> With the legal and cultural aspects of Foucault's treatise in mind, Pease states: "As the sanction for the rules within any specific practice, and as a function of the relations between them, the author for Foucault oversees and regulates all the divers situations in which *any cultural subject* can act. Produced by the practices whose reproduction it guarantees, the name of the author turns otherwise unrelated discursive practices into a coherent cultural realm over which it maintains jurisdiction. If the author disappeared, Foucault claims, so would the entire realm under the author's jurisdiction" (273). The disappearance of the author is not a problem to Foucault who sees a time coming when the author's name will no longer be used to define discourses, for, he asks, "What matter who's speaking?" ("What is an Author?" 138).

However, Pease argues that in fact Foucault has reactivated the argument about the traditional author with his notion of the "fundamental" author (such as Marx and Freud), for with it he has actually returned to a concept of the author as an originary genius (similar to the Leavisite idea of the author) (273-74).

as incorporated a chapter on him in *Liars*, a book which examines a range of contemporary Australian writers. Other critics include Kieran Dolin and Veronica Brady. This thesis, too, as a critical work, is positioned within the discourse of criticism, and as such also speaks the already-spoken, while at the same time seeks to authenticate itself by introducing a new mix of critical perspectives. The other critic who has influenced this thesis's "alternative" reading is Hasluck himself.

Hasluck, as a critic of his own work, should not be given any more status than other critics. According to Umberto Eco, the "author should die once he has finished writing. So as not to trouble the path of the text" (7). He goes on to assert that the

author must not interpret. But he may tell why and how he wrote his book. So-called tests of poetics are not always useful in understanding the work that inspired them, but they help us understand how to solve the technical problem which is the production of a work. (9)

Thus, Hasluck as a critic commenting on Hasluck as a writer should be taken as simply another critical intertext through which the reader can develop his/her own reading. These intertextual sources include not only the articles he has written, but also discussions on the Hasluck's family background and quotations from interviews he has given.

Hasluck's name in this thesis, then, operates in three ways: firstly, as the author-function, indicated by the use of Hasluck as a possessive noun, for example, "Hasluck's work" or "Hasluck's novels." It may also refer to the authorial name which brings all these texts together in Foucault's sense of implying "relationships of homogeneity, filiation, reciprocal explanation, authentication, or of common utilisation" ("What is an Author?" 123). Secondly, the scriptor will be indicated by the reference to "Hasluck-the-writer," and this term will mostly be used when referring to the writing process of, or behind, the texts. Thirdly, Hasluck will be referred to as "Hasluck-the-critic," mostly when reference is being made to an article written, or an interview given, by Hasluck on his own work. Reference to Hasluck's comments (as either writer or critic) should not be taken as prescriptive

or final readings of the novels. Sometimes the author-function, scriptor and the critic-function overlap, and slippage can occur between them, so the terms should not be taken as black and white categories but as useful notions for the purpose of this thesis.

The readings of a variety of critics inevitably draw on a diversity of intertexts, some derived from lived contexts, some from other critical commentaries, and some acquired from readings of similar, generic forms. The novel becomes, as Eco claims, “a machine for generating interpretations” (2). Thus, for any particular work the readings appear endless because of the variety of critics’ backgrounds and knowledge. However, it is also true that the readings are constrained because of the limiting nature and number of social and cultural discourses which mould texts into certain ways of being read. The problematic nature of literary discourse is that it can create lines of thinking which, when constantly followed through reading and re-reading in certain literary circles, have a tendency to become “tramlines” of thought which appear to inhibit the introduction, or production, of different ways of reading. The objective of this thesis, then, is to first examine the ways in which Hasluck’s work has usually been read, and then to propose a different interpretation which is intertextually productive and attempts to cover all his novels to date in one related group.

The first, consistent critical reading of Hasluck’s work has been through the genre of the mystery-thriller. After investigating the pros and cons of this framework, I will further pursue the thriller interpretation by reading Hasluck’s novels through the sub-genre of the negative thriller. The second framework examined will be that of satire, a reading which Hasluck-the-critic refers to in writing about his earlier work. The third and final paradigm will be a chronological reading framed by the cultural and literary movement from modernism to postmodernism. This will lead into a closer examination of certain novels through Linda Hutcheon’s concept of “historiographic metafiction,” others through aspects of Foucauldian theory, and still others through the postmodern emphasis on ontologies and the creation of fictional worlds.

## The First Reading Framework

The initial reading, then, examined in Chapter One, is through the generic framework of the mystery-thriller. Using Tzvetan Todorov's analysis of the construction of the detective and thriller genres, it will be argued that this reading of Hasluck's work is helpful to a point, but overall it is limited and inadequate. In Chapter Two, Jerry Palmer's Marxist reading of the negative thriller provides another, related generic framework through which to read the texts. Again, while this reading offers insights into the early novels, it is a problematic reading for most of Hasluck's work. Part of the reason for the limited usefulness of these fixed frameworks is the reformulation of generic structure.

Reformulating is something all writers do, for, as Heather Dubrow states, the process of reformulation is inescapable.

[T]he very act of choosing a genre . . . involves making a number of implicit statements about one's reaction to that mode of literature, to the writers who have adopted it and to the cultures that have respected it.

(*Genre*, 29)

Reformulation is usually in the form of transgression. Todorov states, in *The Fantastic*, "for there to be transgression the norm must be apparent" (8), that is, the generic conventions must be evident and appreciated by the reader. Hasluck's work, however, stretches the boundaries of genre to a point which makes many readers uncomfortable. Hasluck-the-critic expresses his opinion on the readers' reactions to Hasluck-the-writer's work:

I like the notion of refuting, or subverting expectations. It's odd that the overall impression people have of the books I write is that they are fairly orthodox and conventional, but where I in fact get into a lot of trouble is that I am often consciously subverting expectations in a way that people tend to resent a bit. (Sorensen, "The Anarchy at the Core," 19)

Some of the issues, which are transgressions that can challenge and upset reader expectations, will be explored later in the thesis.

Due to generic transgressions, Hasluck's work cannot be fully appreciated when read only once. While, on the one hand, the reader's initial expectations may be surprised and challenged by the text's unconventionality, on the other hand, re-readings can facilitate deeper analysis. The re-reading immediately produces a reassessment of the emotional perceptions created by the challenges to the generic expectations involved in the first reading. Few surprises ambush the reader the second time around. Where reading is supplemented by re-reading, states Dubrow, "the process of reacting to generic signals is seldom a simple and linear one" (107). Stephen Pepper explains, concerning the process of re-reading, that

successive perceptions tend to become enriched by those that have gone before. This action is sometimes called 'funding.' A late perception in a series thus carries to considerable degree the results of previous perceptions as its constituents. (148)

The complexity of Hasluck's novels, and the sequential, intellectual progression in their production are issues which will be discussed at some length. Hasluck's works are not static, but require the readers to recognise their theoretical transformations and experimentation with literary form. *The Bellarmine Jug* and *The Country Without Music* especially demand re-readings.

## **The Second Reading Framework**

In Chapter Three, satire is the critical framework through which Hasluck's work is read. Satire is a largely neglected term today and it appears to sit uneasily between the paradigms of the modern and postmodern worlds. Parody, however, which is a major component of satire, is common in contemporary texts, for it is a characteristic of postmodernism to expose all which is essentially referential, showing everything to be relative in importance and placement. Nevertheless, in the criticism of postmodern texts, satire is often seen as a mode of expression, or a subordinate part of a text, rather than as a generic type. This chapter first looks at *The Hand That Feeds You* as a traditional satire. It then examines the rest of Hasluck's work through Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of Menippean satire, or

“carnivalised literature,” coupling it together with Frank Palmeri’s reinterpretation of Bakhtin’s notions in the form of postmodern narrative satire.

### **The Third Reading Framework**

Chapter Four begins the major, alternative interpretation of Hasluck’s novels, using the cultural and literary shift from modernism to postmodernism as the main interpretative framework. This chapter presents an overview of Hasluck’s work, showing how they move from a modernist, universal framework to a postmodern, regional perspective. It should be noted, however, that Hasluck-the-critic is not a willing proponent of postmodern concerns. He describes it as

an umbrella term within which I include (in what is admittedly an imprecise way) a wide range of language-based analytical skills such as semiotics, structuralism, deconstruction and all the postmodern variations thereof. (187)

In “Under the Uglich Bell,” he writes of his aversion for postmodernist rhetoric, labelling it the “new sophistry” (187).

But, in spite of Hasluck-the-critic’s antipathy, this chapter argues that Hasluck-the-writer’s texts advocate, pursue, and use postmodern techniques and issues. Maybe, as Eco maintains, it is a matter of process (of the writer making language and narrative work) rather than knowledge (of the critic’s ideas about what constitutes postmodernism). As both a postmodern theorist and writer, Eco speaks of the “loss of innocence,” “metalinguistic play” and the “game of irony” in the postmodern world.

[W]ith the modern, anyone who does not understand the game can only reject it, but with the postmodern, it is possible not to understand the game and yet to take it seriously. Which is, after all, the quality (risk) of irony. (68)

Due to Hasluck’s critical writings, especially on *The Country Without Music*, it would appear that Hasluck-the-writer uses the postmodern discourse with perceptive adroitness, but Hasluck-the-critic draws on contrary discourses tinged

with nostalgia for an earlier literary period and distinguished by their opposition to the postmodern.

The major theorist used in Chapter Four to provide an understanding of the passage from modernism to postmodernism is Linda Hutcheon, with reference also being made to the views of John Frow and Jean-François Lyotard. In the broader cultural and literary movement from the modern to the postmodern, Hutcheon argues, the “postmodern interrogates and demystifies those totalising systems [of the modern] that unify with an aim to power” (186). Postmodernism is not interested in new master narratives, but it admits its regionality, its provinciality. This chapter argues that the change from modernism to postmodernism, from assuming meta-narratives to the problematising the wholeness of the texts, also parallels the transformation in emphasis between the early books of Hasluck and his later work. Hasluck’s early work is largely concerned with the examination of the institutions of society, the way they function and the human dimensions and dilemmas they raise. His later works create their own fictional world within which to problematise and examine the conditions and assumptions of the world we currently inhabit, analysing the processes of meaning-making in literature, history, and Australian culture. The development in Hasluck’s novels, from modernistic concerns to the postmodern, is exemplified by the transition in his work from universal considerations to local interests, and this, in turn, has coincided with his movement from overseas to regional publishing. Furthermore, the project of Hasluck’s novels is to interrogate the issues of the regional in Western Australia, and the institutions, or “totalising systems,” of society, such as the law, history and literature. There are no binaries in postmodernism, for all is in flux and exists simultaneously in a process of contradiction and change. Meaning, therefore, comes from engagement. Hasluck’s novels are engaged texts, interacting with issues of theory, literature and history.

In Chapter Five, Hutcheon’s postmodern concept of “historiographic metafiction” is shown to be an ideal framework in which to read *The Bellarmine Jug* and *Truant State*. Hutcheon describes how in



historiographic metafiction, the novelist and the historian are shown to write in tandem with others – and with each other. . . . The novel shares the historian’s view of historiography as both a contemporary event and related to self-knowledge. Just as the novel mixes historical and fictive events and personages, so its textual fabric mixes the historiographic and the novelistic. (190)

These two novels of Hasluck mix “historical and fictive events and personages,” and are concerned with the interaction and play between fiction and truth in both history and literature. Historiographic metafiction reveals that historical narratives are built on fragments of literary texts. There is a real past but it is inaccessible, except through contextualised, ideologically-framed fragments. Historiographic metafiction, then, problematises history (rethinks it but does not deny it or make it obsolete) and puts under notice the literary framework in which it is inscribed. Hutcheon explains, in postmodernism’s reinscribing of society’s discourses, parody “seems to offer a perspective on the present and the past which allows an artist to speak *to* a discourse from *within* it, but without being totally recuperated by it” (35). The parodic texts examined in this chapter reinterpret Western Australian history in an ironic way, but are not committed to that reinterpretation because they deftly undermine both the assumptions of constructed history and the literary medium in which it resides.<sup>3</sup>

Chapter Six prepares the reader for the imaginary world of *The Country Without Music*, *The Blossville File* and *A Grain of Truth*. The historical displacement outlined in Michel Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish*, from the quarantine to panopticism, is reflected in the cultural change from modernism to postmodernism. That same transformation is present in Australian society’s move from a penal colony to a democracy, and it is also a framework which closely fits the chronological production of Hasluck’s narratives. The main novels used to demonstrate the correlation between the social/historical theory of Foucault and

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<sup>3</sup> This postmodern strategy describes a technique common to some extent to all of Hasluck’s novels. Furthermore, it describes how Hasluck-the-writer speaks to theories of postmodernism from within the postmodern contexts of his novels. For example, a number of his novels parody postmodern concepts (such as the death of the author), but at their conclusion still remain open-ended, postmodern novels.

Hasluck's work are *Quarantine* and *The Hand That Feeds You*. Although these novels are referred to extensively in other chapters, different readings produce different perspectives. In this chapter they most clearly demonstrate the shift from the conditions of modernism and the quarantine to postmodernism and panopticism.

Hasluck's trilogy, set in the imaginary French colony off the Western Australian coast, is dealt with in Chapter Seven. The ontological aspect of postmodernism, as argued by Brian McHale, provides a means to examine these conjured worlds. These novels employ a ficto-critical approach, integrating and interrogating the theoretical and historical possibilities of French and British history and social theory. Furthermore, they depict an imaginary world, combining elements of different geographical places and various cultural groupings. In this postmodern environment, issues of Western Australian and Australian history are explored as well as possibilities of alternative cultural and social outcomes in the antipodes. Hutcheon explains that postmodernism "teaches that all cultural practices have an ideological subtext which determines the conditions of the very possibility of their production of meaning" (xii-xiii). These novels contest the production of meaning of identity, history and community in Australia.

Hasluck's novels, however, do not call for radical political, social and historical reform, but they constitute more of a contained political action. As Hutcheon states, there

is contradiction, but no dialectic in postmodernism. And it is essential that the doubleness be maintained, not resolved . . . . It is the doubleness that renders unlikely the possible extremes of both political quietism and radical revolution. (209)

The open-endedness of all of Hasluck's work means the issues raised remain unresolved, and, therefore, their political impact remains as a troublesome provocation to the official narratives of the nation. They threaten the wholeness and the apparent naturalness of the nation's narratives about its people and its history and they raise uncomfortable stories and possibilities which do not sit easily with the accepted narrative.

## Chapter 1

**Reading the Critics: The Mystery-Thriller Genre**

*Where mystery begins, justice ends.*

*(The Bellarmine Jug, 170)*

Hasluck's early novels have been read by some critics as mystery-thrillers.<sup>4</sup> This generic interpretation appears to have had a lasting, disproportionate influence on the reading patterns for his later works. Although Hasluck's novels are tales of mystery, the thriller classification is an inadequate description of his work. Paradoxically, while Hasluck's work has continued to be linked to the thriller category, the inadequacy of this typology has constantly been acknowledged by the critics. This chapter, and the one following, will explore the strengths, problems and limitations of classifying and reading Hasluck's novels through the thriller genre.

The practice of reading novels through the paradigm of generic classification places an emphasis on theme, plot, character and style, so texts are categorised according to similar traits and to patterns of relatively fixed frameworks. These established categories, then, become the common, or institutionalised, way of interpreting and reading texts, allowing the knowing reader to anticipate and accept certain events and perspectives, such as that children can fly in a fantasy tale, or, that apparently irregular events will eventually be rationally explained in a detective novel. Values, too, are presumed to be already given, such as the "goodies" and "baddies" in a Western, or the private eye and the villain in a detective story. How these values are authorised and changed within generic classifications raises political and ideological issues concerning the manipulation of an audience's way of seeing, and the stratagems surrounding the dominant patterns through which a society reads the world. The limiting nature of generic readings and the controlling power of their

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<sup>4</sup> Those critics include Hasluck-the-Critic, who, early in his career argued that the attributes of the mystery-thriller genre allowed Hasluck-the-writer to address broad issues within Australian society ("Imprudent Friends," 111-12).

ideological foundations need to be kept in mind when reading the work of Hasluck through the parameters of the mystery-thriller.

### The Critics

Through an extensive documenting of critics' attempts to read Hasluck's novels as mystery-thrillers it can be shown just how pervasive this reading practice has been, especially with his earlier works. It also reveals the underlying dissatisfaction such readings bring. When *Quarantine*, Hasluck's first novel, was published in 1979, Dorothy Colmer claimed it is every bit "the thriller described on the dust-jacket, a novel of sophisticated intrigue and murder" ("Comedy and Terror Out of Quarantine," 8) and Susan Kobulniczky maintained it has the "ingredients of a good thriller" ("Books," 86). Other reviewers, however, argued that the text shows inadequacies as a thriller, for the murder is never solved, the cause of the quarantine is never revealed, and the narrator's primary concern is in developing philosophical ideas which could clear him of any sense of lingering guilt he might have had over the affair, rather than in untangling the mysteries of the crime. Mark MacLeod, in contrast to Colmer, labelled *Quarantine*'s original thriller-style cover "the misleading 33-flavoured dust-jacket Macmillan has wrapped it up in" ("Conspiracy with No Clear Cause," 17). Clifford Hanna, after describing the novel as a "whodunit," stated that "*Quarantine* is a straightforward story which builds in a reasonably satisfactory way to its non-conclusion . . ." (*Southerly*, 224). Emily Platt, writing in *Artlook*, found the novel and its characterisation "disappointing," but also alluded to other allegorical readings as possibly more satisfying (36). Thus, from the reviews of Hasluck's earliest work, it can be seen that the critics' comments have been drawn to the generic assumptions of the mystery-thriller, and yet those same comments are tinged with an uncertainty as to whether or not the novel fully meets the generic expectations.

The transferred influence of the generic reading is apparent in reviews of *The Blue Guitar*, Hasluck's second novel, for, although it is not a mystery-thriller, it is likened to *Quarantine*. Helen Daniel, for example, sees it as "a kind of moral

thriller, playing on suspense and intrigue, a narrative mode with which Hasluck is at ease" ("Morality and Survival," 9). Veronica Brady claims that the characterisation of the outlandish Corporate Affairs investigator in the novel, "sends up the stereotypes of detective heroes with a touch of Kafka" ("The Novel as Anti-Fiction," 12).

Hasluck's fourth, award-winning novel, *The Bellarmine Jug*, is more obviously a thriller, and, again, the critics endorse this reading with some considered recognition of its limitations. Laurie Clancy acknowledges that *The Bellarmine Jug* is a complex novel and, like *Quarantine*, is of the detective genre. But he summarises his review by stating that the novel "is finally concerned with an enigma rather than a mystery" ("Mystery, and Much More, on Board the *Batavia*," 19). Jim Crace struggles with the novel's "cryptic and playful tone," and asserts that the plainest explanation of *The Bellarmine Jug* is that it is "a complex espionage yarn," but then admits that this is "the least trustworthy of interpretations" ("In the Melting Pot," 266). Geoffrey Dutton labels *The Bellarmine Jug* "a kind of espionage thriller" ("Australia Seen Through Three Pairs of Eyes," 67), and Nancy Keesing betrays her frustration when she offers Hasluck the advice that

the genre 'thriller' is an honourable one and no first-rate novelist need be apologetic about attempting it. Great thrillers are great novels. Pulp thrillers can be exciting but forgettable.

This is not a pulp thriller at all, nor is it a straight novel. It is a good read and I do wish Hasluck had let himself go just that desirable fraction more, given an excellent plot its head, and expressed his convictions with due courage. ("Old Bones Given a New Shake," 15)

Keesing still wants to see Hasluck's novels as thrillers. Those who seem to come closest to redefining *The Bellarmine Jug* into a different, though similar, category to the thriller are Gabrielle Lord, who calls it an "academic thriller" ("Complex Academic Thriller," 30), and Helen Daniel who classifies all Hasluck's early novels, including *The Bellarmine Jug*, as "moral thrillers" ("Moral Thrillers," 11). While the majority of critics have read *The Bellarmine Jug* through the thriller

category,<sup>5</sup> it is, in fact, a very complex novel which can be profitably read through a variety of interpretive frames.

*Truant State*, too, is categorised by the critics, with various degrees of reservation, as a mystery-thriller. Trevor James claims Hasluck “has a happy knack of mixing history and reflection with the elements of the thriller” (“Saga Country,” 119), while Rosemary O’Grady asserts it “defies generic description, being Hasluck’s unique mix of suspense, thriller, mystery, novel of ideas, . . . history and romance” (“Dreams and Seduction Out West,” 14). Van Ikin and Kieran Dolin write that *Truant State* “moves skilfully from the mood of a murder mystery to that of a romance, embracing the extremes of violence and comedy” (“Australia,” 9). *Truant State*, however, comes in for a number of scathing reviews, partly because of the critics’ persistence in reading it as a thriller. For example, Gerard Windsor in the *Fremantle Arts Review* claims Hasluck attempts a mix of genres, including “a detective novel (for the book’s last third),” which “fails because nothing is done with any profundity or subtlety” (“Truant State,” 14). In the *Bulletin*, Susan McKernan maintains “*Truant State* ought to have everything. It has a fascinating historical moment, love, murder and money. Yet somehow, the whole novel doesn’t add up to the sum of its very good parts (“What’s Behind Fred and Ruby,” 70). Thelma Forshaw agrees, describing *Truant State* as a “rather tepid romance . . . and an unexciting murder mystery. Ingredients there are in plenty, only the mixture falls flat” (“From Sweaty Past to Trendy Present,” 15).<sup>6</sup> Katharine England also concurs, stating, “*Truant State* is at once a love story, a murder mystery, a fictionalised history and a character study,” and goes on to suggest that “the murder mystery which seems intended to give a general shape or focus to Hasluck’s mass of detail is of too little interest to fulfil such a structural function” (“Appeal Fades in Plethora of Themes,” 8). By contrast, Hal Colebatch, in the *West Australian*, expresses his belief that Hasluck’s role as “a leading Perth

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<sup>5</sup> Exceptions include Daniel’s “The Case Against the Truth” in *Liars*, where she examines *The Bellarmine Jug* in terms of the nature of truth, and Dolin’s “Legal Fictions and Nicholas Hasluck’s *The Bellarmine Jug*,” which explores the novel’s themes of history and law.

<sup>6</sup> Hasluck-the-critic calls Forshaw “the self-confessed political moron” (“The Past’s Deceitful Dream,” 119).

barrister” influences the local issues in *Truant State*, so that “his handling of the murder mystery and the shady deals that are a constant background is particularly skilful and assured” (“Rich Shadows in WA’s Clear Light,” 14). Colebatch’s review shows a writer’s solidarity with another local writer, but it also hints at other readings of Hasluck’s work which place less emphasis on generic expectations and which may provide more productive readings.

*Truant State*, however, is the end of the era in which Hasluck’s work has been seen to succeed or fail on its merits as a mystery-thriller. Hasluck-the-critic appears to have reached a point of exasperation with the reviewers, for, in an interview with Veronica Brady in *Australian Society*, he expresses his annoyance with the critical response to *Truant State*:

If you write a book called *Quarantine* about a group of passengers being quarantined in a small port in the Suez canal and one of them dies violently, the inevitable reaction of the critics is to say this is a murder mystery, which immediately set them off on entirely the wrong trail and they then go on to ignore all the other thematic and conceptual concerns in the book.

There has been an element of that with *Truant State*. People keep wanting to push the book into a neatly defined pigeon-hole: it’s a political intrigue, it’s a murder mystery, it’s a nostalgic piece of nonsense. . . . But in this book I think the problem I constantly face is that I’m painting on the broad canvas, running a whole lot of concerns together because they are of interest to me. It is true that they may in some sense slow the action in terms of unravelling a traditional mystery, but it is just the way I write books. (“Just As It Was on the Goldfields,” 52)

Nevertheless, even though the apparent necessity to interpret Hasluck’s work through the grid of the thriller appears to have ceased after *Truant State*, the legacy of reading his work that way still casts a shadow over some of the reviews of his later novels.

The critical responses to *The Country Without Music*, for example, were more broad, but innuendos about the thriller still surface in an indirect way. In the *Australian Book Review*, Thomas Shapcott describes it as having “something of the raciness of a thriller” (“Cool, Disciplined and Very Much in Control,” 124). Helen Daniel contends that like *The Bellarmine Jug*, *The Country Without Music* is poised between narrative suspense and intellectual energies as Hasluck explores complex moral and historical themes” (“Splendid Fugues of Truth and Masquerade Play on,” 9). Reba Gostand’s review also implies the presence of the thriller element, describing the novel as “slow moving in the way a cat stalking a mouse is slow moving but tingling with menace. . . . the spies and counter-spies watch each other . . .” (“History Repeats - And Repeats,” 69).

So, too, *The Blosseville File*, a collection of disparate, tenuously-linked short stories, is seen by Rosemary O’Grady as part-thriller:

Hasluck is a writer who demands much of his reader. He insists upon attentiveness. If it is not given, something important is likely to be overlooked. This is not only the thriller-writer’s craft, it is also the instinct of the poet, who makes every word count. (“Rewarding Rogues and Rebels,” 8)

It seems Hasluck, regardless of the work he produces, must be categorised by some critics as a thriller writer.

It is, perhaps, this tendency of some critics and publishers to position Hasluck’s novels as thrillers which has led to *A Grain of Truth* bearing the close-up profile of the face of a private eye on its cover jacket. The cover may be to promote sales, but the novel is certainly not a suspense-filled murder tale, but rather a story about the integrity of people and institutions, and the search for truth and morality within the law. Mark Reid goes part way to acknowledging the disparity between the cover and the narrative when he describes *A Grain of Truth* as “a mystery driven not by startling revelation but by qualification and the shifting of perspective” (“Book Reviews,” 12). Ironically, while the publishers produced a thriller-cover for the novel, most critics did not classify it through that generic grid. Perhaps



David Wood's review best sums up the response to the cover and the text when he claims he was "anticipating *A Grain of Truth* to be an entertaining detective yarn," and had settled himself down "for a few hours ride on a roller-coaster of intrigue," however, he was disappointed with the novel which turned out to be a discourse on issues of truth and justice ("Where Every Grain Counts," 6).

The critics, then, have a propensity to read Hasluck's work through the thriller genre, and although they acknowledge that such readings are limited and unsatisfactory, nevertheless, the majority offer little in the way of constructive alternative readings.<sup>7</sup> As the thriller genre has been an important interpretive practice in the reading of Hasluck's work, we must define our understanding of genre, and, more specifically, the attributes of the mystery-thriller, before continuing this exploration.

### **Todorov on Genre**

With the passage of time, generic categories alter, being defined and structured differently in different literary periods. Sometimes they have been organised around literary themes (for example, see the work of Northrop Frye), or according to the text's structure (Vladimir Propp), or through the social and historic context of the text's formation (Raymond Williams). These varying methods of categorising genre account for the discontinuous, incompatible shifts in generic categories throughout literary history, as is noted by Jameson in his description of the semantic models (tragedy, comedy, etc), and the syntactic models (the generic structures developed by the formalists and structuralists) (*The Political Unconscious*, 103-50). Different generic categories allow for different readings of the same literature. The generic approach chosen for this discussion on the mystery-thriller is primarily the social-linguistic framework argued by Tzvetan Todorov in his early days as a structuralist.

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<sup>7</sup> The notable exceptions are Helen Daniel, Kieran Dolin and Veronica Brady.

“Chronologically,” Todorov insists, “there is no ‘before genre’” (*Genres in Discourse*, 161). Writers, readers and texts are embedded in society within which ideologies are institutionalised and reflected in both spoken and literary genres, so that writers and readers, as inter-relating parts of society, also have a performative function in the existing generic system. Todorov describes genres as the “codification of discursive properties,” whereby texts are classified according to a codified norm (*Genres in Discourse*, 162). It is the institutionalisation of the codes in the discursive functioning of society which both constitutes and reveals the existence of genres. Thus the discourses generated about the institutionalised codes, such as those of literary critics and teachers, historicise the genres into “classes of texts” which reflect the dominant ideologies of their times (“The Origins of Genre,” 161). Todorov argues that all genres are socially based, that is, they originate from the necessity to communicate through speech in the lived, interactive world.

Todorov contends that genres can be categorised by relating them back to their social function, for “[t]he identity of the genre comes from the speech act that is at its base . . .” (*Genres in Discourse*, 169). These speech acts are the common types of oral stories told in everyday life. All current genres, claims Todorov, have their roots in the prevailing kinds of oral social discourse. In the case of the mystery-thriller, the speech act at its base is the oral variation of the detective story, or the “whodunit:” the fireside stories told of ancient mysteries, or homespun tales of dreadful murders of innocents and of horrific punishments which befall the perpetrators. The modern, literary detective genre is usually traced back to the American writer, Edgar Allen Poe, whose short stories “The Purloined Letter,” “The Murders in the Rue Morgue,” and “The Mystery of Marie Roget,” have C. Auguste Dupin, a private detective, as the central character. Poe’s detective is a master of mind games, memory and analytical investigation. In “The Mystery of Marie Roget,” for example, Dupin doesn’t solve the murder through a detailed examination of the homicide scene, or by physically tracking down and mentally outwitting the murderer, but by piecing together the mystery through the reading of newspaper reports in the comfort of his lounge room. Other fictional detectives,

such as Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes, have followed in the footsteps of the perceptive, logical Dupin. More recently, however, the detective story has developed into the mystery-thriller category, typified by the work of Raymond Chandler in novels such as *The Lady in the Lake* and *Farewell, My Lovely*, where Philip Marlowe must vigilantly watch out for his life as the plot violently twists and turns. In the mystery-thriller, much of the action, the danger and suspense, centre on the detective, who no longer takes an analytical, armchair role, but runs the very real danger of becoming the murderer's next victim.

In "The Typology of Detective Fiction" Todorov describes the difference between the detective novel and the mystery-thriller. The detective novel, he maintains, is often written as a memoir which revolves around two stories: firstly, the crime, and, secondly, the investigation. The story of the crime is the "real" story, being short, dramatic and separate from the story of the investigation. The story of the investigation is the narrative which is immediately present, but it is "insignificant," being usually "neutral and plain" (46-47). The detective novel is dominated by mystery, and is usually retrospective, as the detective painstakingly pieces together the clues of the "absent" story of the crime. The mystery-thriller, however, suppresses the first dramatic story of the crime and foregrounds the action and thrill of the story of the investigation. Thrillers are immediate, present action, not memoirs, for it is uncertain that the narrator will reach the end of the story alive. Ironically, in spite of its name, the mystery-thriller is not driven so much by mystery as by suspense and curiosity aroused in the reader. It is mostly prospective, progressively and dramatically developing through the forward movement of the plot.

The themes of the mystery-thriller, Todorov maintains, are constructed around violence, amorality and sordid crime. As to origins, Todorov asserts the thriller was "created in the United States just before and particularly after World War Two . . ." ("Typology," 47). The thriller's evolution from the detective genre, like the evolution of all genres, was "not necessarily constituted by the negation of the main feature of the old, but from a different complex of properties, not by

necessity logically harmonious with the first form” (52). New genres do not always grow out of antecedent ones, but may be logically discontinuous and historically ambivalent in that they may coexist or even actually precede (perhaps being hidden or contained in a different generic grouping) rather than simply supersede the well-known generic types. To back up this claim, Todorov notes the simultaneous existence of detective, thriller and suspense novels in the writings of such authors as Arthur Conan Doyle and Maurice Leblanc.

Hasluck’s novels, in so far as they can be classified as thrillers, have something of a simultaneous mix of thriller and detective genre, for they lack dramatic tension, concentrating on the investigation which usually has an analytical complexity reminiscent of the mind-games of Poe’s tales. For example, complexity rather than action is highlighted in *Quarantine* and *The Bellarmine Jug* where the narrators and protagonists are older men pondering mysterious events of their youth. These novels are not orthodox thrillers, for their memoir-style means the reader knows the narrator or protagonist has survived the events of the narrative, so a crucial element of suspense is lost. The mix of detective and mystery-thriller genre is apparent across a number of Hasluck’s novels which share similar literary characteristics. Such characteristics include a crime (usually murder), or a problem which needs to be solved; a solution which is difficult to find; a plot which has one or more twists in it so the end result is by no means obvious at the start; and some semblance of the opposing camps of hero and villain. Furthermore, the villain usually appears to be beyond reformation in the mind of the narrator/protagonist and so must be brought to justice, or eliminated, in order to save additional innocent people becoming his/her victims.

Hasluck’s novels, like all detective and mystery-thriller tales, rely on the readers’ willingness to participate in “the suspension of disbelief,” and their acceptance of the values and conventions of the genre in order to develop the mystery and maintain some level of suspense. The suspension of disbelief is the cornerstone on which all genres function. Generic form limits what can be said, done and expected, and it is through narrative patterns recognisable to the reader that the

story can be developed and brought to a closure. The suspension of disbelief in the detective genre usually includes the immunity of the detective from mortal harm, the inevitable solving of the case, and the exposure of the villain through the detective's superior competence. The conventions of detective fiction which need to be accepted by the reader include a limited development of character (even of the protagonist), and the withholding of at least one vital clue until the end when the super-sleuth explains all. Such suspension of disbelief and acceptance of convention is crucial for the functioning of the detective genre, and in this sense the detective novel sets up its own verisimilitude, or appearance of truth, through the literary parameters of the genre.

Todorov, in "Introduction to Verisimilitude," states that investigating "verisimilitude is equivalent to showing that discourses are not governed by a correspondence with their referent but by their own laws . . ." ("Introduction," 81). Paradoxically, the mystery-thriller, or the murder mystery, is developed around the establishing of an "*antiverisimilitude*" ("Introduction," 85) in which nothing is as it seems. To produce the genre's suspense, the apparent truth is made an illusion; the least likely person is the criminal; the most unexpected twists are certain to happen. In this genre the narrative only continues while the tension between truth and verisimilitude continues, for when the antagonism is resolved, the mystery is solved and the narrative ends. But the paradox, as Todorov explains, is that

by relying on antiverisimilitude, the murder mystery has come under the sway of another verisimilitude, that of its own genre. No matter how much it contests ordinary verisimilitudes, it will always remain subject to *some* verisimilitude. ("Introduction," 86)

The situation of the mystery-thriller, then, is that the more it succeeds in contesting common, everyday verisimilitudes the more the verisimilitude of the genre to which it belongs is strengthened. "Hence," says Todorov, "the murder mystery affords our purest image of the impossibility of escaping verisimilitude: the more we condemn verisimilitude, the more we are enslaved by it" ("Introduction," 87).

The uncloaking and questioning of verisimilitude is both the project and the predicament of Hasluck's work. It is a predicament because these novels, which intellectually analyse social, political and historical concerns, do not fully adhere to the conventional mystery-thriller form, and so, when read through the parameters of the mystery-thriller genre, may disappoint readers with their lack of murders, blood trails and nail-biting twists in the plot. Not one of Hasluck's novels has the suspense required of a "true" thriller, for there is little risk to the hero's life, and none of the mysteries is brought to a satisfactory conclusion. Nevertheless, the very issue which disappoints many critics is an integral part of the text's project, for through the very process of difference from the expected norm, each of the narratives does, in some way, disrupt the reader's expectations, thus revealing the presence of the dominant cultural and ideological assumptions which give most thrillers their appearance of truth. The common thread through the novels is the project of questioning the verisimilitude, or appearance of truth, of various cultural institutions and practices, and the already-given antiverisimilitude of the mystery-thriller serves this purpose well.

Thus, in Hasluck's work, verisimilitude, or the appearance of truth, is often the subject of the narrative, rather than simply a literary technique to keep the reader "in the dark." In *Quarantine*, for example, the narrative is straightforward, without the twists of an elaborate thriller. The lack of the convolutions which usually characterise mystery-thrillers is partly due to the lack of a victim, for the murder does not take place till the end of the story. The effect of the "postponed" murder, and the lack of twists in the tale, should keep the reader guessing as to the generic code by which the novel might be read. Thus the novel becomes a kind of parody of the mystery-thriller, constantly postponing the central elements of both mystery and murder, so the reader is perpetually in suspense as to the true nature of the narrative. Furthermore, as the murderer is never revealed, subsequent readings tease the reader with various possibilities.

Not murder and guilt, but brazen impenitence characterises Hasluck's second book, *The Blue Guitar*. Attempts to categorise this novel as a thriller push the boundaries

of the genre beyond its limits, for there are no dead bodies and no great suspense. Helen Daniel partially circumvents the classification problem by calling the novel a moral-thriller rather than a mystery-thriller. But, similar to a thriller, verisimilitude and antiverisimilitude are central to the narrative's plot. The novel's antiverisimilitude, or contestation of the appearance of truth, is carefully constructed around the central character who is a businessman with an appearance of being committed to others – a good-natured, friendly person who cannot stop himself helping people, even though it costs him personally. But to the reader's disquiet, a moral predicament arises and the affable entrepreneur's business ethics suddenly deteriorate as he decides to save himself and sells out on his vulnerable, trusting partner who is the inventor of a blue, transistorised, self-playing guitar. Perhaps, because the partner's business is "murdered," the novel could be characterised as a small-business thriller.

As with *The Blue Guitar*, there is no body to discover in *The Hand That Feeds You*, for it, too, is not a conventional mystery-thriller, but a satire, the only mystery being the whereabouts of the person who holds the key to understanding the Australia of the future. The mystery person is Henry Meynard, the man who has engineered the political changes which have brought "big brother" to every facet of Australian life. But Meynard has disappeared. The narrative builds expectations in the reader that Meynard will be able to throw some light on the social and economic nightmare, but when found, he is an invalid, only able to whisper mysterious words which appear to have little meaning. The novel could be called a political-thriller in the sense that the dead body is Australia's liberal democracy. Once again, in the shadowy Australia of the future, which has become the nightmarish product of a welfare and union-dominated liberal democracy, nothing is as it appears to be.

The thriller elements of murder, mayhem and mystery are certainly to be found in *The Bellarmine Jug*. In this, Hasluck's fourth novel, the main mystery centres around the missing Pelsaert documents, and the meaning of the Rosy Cross superimposed on the Bellarmine jugs. Between riots and murders, the protagonist,

Leon Davies, tries to get to the bottom of the intrigue which grows increasingly complex. The apparent truths which are constantly reversed catch the reader unaware, and include the villains, such as Niesmann the librarian, suddenly switching to the “good” side, and the revelation that a close, trusted friend of the protagonist is a Russian mole. As with other Hasluck novels, the protagonist is unable to solve the mystery. Although the narrative is somewhat complex, slow-moving and memoir-orientated, *The Bellarmine Jug* does build antiverisimilitudes, and includes some of the ingredients of a classic mystery-thriller.

*Truant State* is also a mystery-thriller, of sorts, set in the social circles of Perth in the 1930s. A number of unexpected reversals happen, including the likeable Romney Guy lining his own pockets after convincing the narrator’s father to sink his money into a sham project, and the narrator’s failure to capture the heart of his childhood love. Once again, however, the murder takes place near the end of the narrative, when one of the narrator’s colleagues is shot dead in the car park at Government House. The murder puzzles the narrator and his friends, so they seek to reconstruct scenarios to discover the killer, but, in true mystery-thriller style, all is not as it seems. In the closing paragraphs, as the loud music from the ball at Government House soars on the crisp midnight air, a sudden authorial switch occurs, moving the text from first to second-person, and “you,” the reader, find that the unidentified murderer is crunching his/her way towards you across the dark, deserted car park. You suddenly know this is it – death is at hand, and you will never know the identity of the murderer: your executioner. With the sudden change of narrative voice, the expectation of the apparent closure of the thriller is overturned, so that the reader, not the narrator-detective, becomes the hunted. Once again, a generic technique turns against the genre, using antiverisimilitude to parody the institutions of the thriller genre itself. Hasluck-the-writer, however, is not alone in using this device, for turning the traits of the genre on itself is not unusual within the thriller. Umberto Eco claims

the Parisian Oulipo group [who produce literature by mathematical combinatory means] has recently constructed a matrix of all possible



murder-story situations and has found that there is still to be written a book in which the murderer is the reader" (*Reflections*, 78).

All other combinations, including the reader being the victim, have already been written. What Hasluck-the-writer's use of the device does, however, is to problematise the very notion of genre as a framework for reading his text.

Hasluck's sixth novel, *The Country Without Music*, is set on an imaginary pair of islands off the Western Australian coast, and is more of a history-mystery than a mystery-thriller, for in the fictitious world the narrative explores issues of history and identity. Mystery permeates the life of Jacqueline, the supposed adopted daughter of the Administrator. Her vivaciousness and alluring charm hides the mysterious past she has inherited from her mother, symbolised and passed on to her through the legendary bone flute which hangs around her neck. In Jacqueline's life, nothing is as it seems. Mystery also surrounds the small group of Creole dissidents who seek to overthrow the government through peaceful revolution, but, in spite of the narrative's build-up to their act of revolution, they do not succeed, and their attempt to change history by toppling the government comes to nothing. However, in the aftermath of the revolutionary act another reversal of expectations takes place, for the Administrator is quietly replaced and the new government is headed by one of the former revolutionaries. Characteristically for a novel by Hasluck, social change is incremental rather than revolutionary, and at the end of the narrative, in spite of the change of government, little is different politically or socially for the people of the islands and the region.

Hasluck's next novel, *The Blosseville File*, is a collection of stories set in the same landscape as *The Country Without Music*. Some of the stories are concerned with mystery and murder, such as "Approaching the Centrepoint," built around the Eric Edgar Cooke murders in Perth in the 1960s. Another crime story, "Airport and Centrepoint," carries references to the Barlow-Chambers drug trial in Malaysia, but is more of a literary exploration of the characters than a mystery-thriller. These short crime stories are almost "real life" narratives, being fictional accounts of lived events which highlight legal and judicial issues, rather than thrillers with

sudden reversals in expectations. Basing fiction on fact, however, does have a verisimilitude of its own – a verisimilitude of event, or in these cases a verisimilitude of crime.

Hasluck's eighth novel also lacks the components of the traditional mystery-thriller, for it is more concerned with legal corruption, drug-dealing and the struggles of a lawyer to find his identity than with the development of a suspense-filled plot. The suspense which does exist is caused by the junior partner of the reputable law firm, who is also the narrator, being left in the dark on important issues. When two younger, high-flying lawyers enter the firm, his already weak position is increasingly threatened. The strongest reversal of expectations in this lawyer-mystery is the junior partner's decision, in the end, to make a deliberate stand for what he believes is right, even if it prejudices the reputation of the law firm. This reversal is quite out of character for the junior partner, who is the epitome of the lawyer for whom reticence is a virtue.

Consequently, it can be seen that the relative strength of verisimilitude and antiverisimilitude varies throughout the plots of Hasluck's texts. The novel in which this characteristic is strongest is *The Bellarmine Jug*. Verisimilitude itself, however, is explored as a subject within the narrations of Hasluck's "mystery-thrillers," especially through the over-turning of the expectations of the thriller genre itself. The interrogation of verisimilitude, a literary feature common to the detective genre, is achieved through deferring and overturning the conventions and expectations of the genre, by retelling the same incidents through multiple voices, by showing the relativity of truth and by revealing the illusion of the two-sided hero-villain construct. The main emphasis in Hasluck's novels, then, is the use of the characteristics of the mystery-thriller genre to explore, rather than to create, verisimilitudes for the reader.

But, as Todorov points out, the paradox persists that literary works which try to challenge narrations and ideologies, either to expose them or, perhaps more ambitiously, to change them, are themselves subject to the ideologies and generic

assumptions of the novel form itself. While Hasluck-the-writer adapts and uses the mystery-thriller genre to expose the verisimilitudes he sees in the common, unquestioned narratives society tells about itself, the genre can also constrict and limit his audience's appreciation of his literary project. This contradiction between the function and the nature of Hasluck's novels can, perhaps, go part way to explaining why, to many readers, his work is difficult to classify and read.

These literary enterprises, however, do more than challenge the generic parameters of the thriller genre, for they may jolt the reader into realising the questionable assumptions, or appearances of truth, which hold together some of the seemingly indisputable institutions of society. The potential of the thriller to explore the wider parameters of society is propounded by Umberto Eco in *Reflections on The Name of the Rose*, where he argues that thrillers succeed, not because of the corpses and the triumphal endings where good overcomes evil, but because

the crime novel represents a kind of conjecture, pure and simple. . . .

After all, the fundamental question of philosophy (like that of psychoanalysis) is the same as that of the detective novel: who is guilty? To know this (to think you know this), you have to conjecture that all events have a logic that the guilty party has imposed on them. Every story of investigation and of conjecture tells us something that we have been close to knowing (pseudo-Heideggerian reference). At this point it is clear why my basic story (whodunit?) ramifies into so many other stories, all stories of other conjectures, all linked with the same structure of conjecture as such. (56-57)

Hasluck's many stories of conjecture include speculation about, and the questioning of, the institutions of society, such as the law, history and literature itself. The verisimilitudes of society are the ideological assumptions on which it builds its interpretation of life, and those assumptions are the logic of the "guilty party," and it is the "guilty party," and those who share their assumptions, which Hasluck's novels of conjecture seek to expose.

A writer exposing and challenging assumptions, however, is very different from a novelist seeking to overthrow and change society. The distinction is explained by Todorov, who states that though

we may discover the laws and conventions of the life around us, it is not within our power to change them – we shall always be obliged to obey them, though such obedience is twice as difficult after this discovery. . . . To know that justice obeys the laws of verisimilitude, not of truth, will keep no one from being sentenced. (“Introduction,” 87)

Hasluck’s novels support the inevitability of the laws of verisimilitude in life, for they do not propose a utopian future or a revolutionary new society. At the most, the reader senses that the novels chip away at, seeking to reform rather than replace, the controlling master narratives and the uncontested assumptions of Western society and of Australia in particular. The novels, then, are more characterised by a form of truancy than by dramatic calls for revolution.

## Truancy

“Truant,” according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, originated from a Celtic word for vagrant or beggar. Around 1449 the word was used in English to refer to absconding schoolchildren. Through its origins, therefore, the word truant has the connotations of childhood rebellion, which in the long term, if unchecked by the rule of the school system, could lead to vagrancy or beggary. The modern usage of the word “truant” goes beyond the schoolyard, to denote a person who evades or neglects his or her duty, usually in an anti-authoritarian way. The characteristics of the truant, then, bear a close affinity with the image of the cocky, leg-pulling, disrespectful, yet benign, shirker, traditionally known in Australia as the larrikin. Present-day larrikins in Australia are not equated with political revolution, nor with the overturning of a nation’s conventions, but rather with attributes which display a spirit of playful, and sometimes spiteful, rebellion against institutional authority. The underlying conservative nature of the Australian larrikin is evident in that the term has been used to describe a couple of Australia’s recent Labor Prime Ministers.

Although having a rebellious spirit towards institutional control, the truant-cum-larrikin maintains a dynamic, interdependent relationship with authority, whereby rebellion and sanction are counterbalanced. Truancy, or the threat of truancy, can, on the one hand, reinforce the authority of the controlling institution, but, on the other hand, it can also motivate it to question and reform itself from within. Similarly, the truant depends upon the continuation of the institution's sanctions to preserve his or her status as a larrikin, but he/she is also dependent on the institution's leniency in order to survive and not be crushed by overbearing sanctions or punishments. Thus the school reasserts its authority over the entire school population when it reprimands those who play hooky, while the truant's pleasure, defiance and public infamy are maintained by the threat of institutional disapproval and the application of the sanctions.

The larrikin in Australian popular culture depends on the disapproving gaze of Anglo-centric institutions, while those very institutions maintain their dour authority by allowing the larrikin flagrantly to flout the rules. Ironically, Australian society can tolerate the larrikin because, in the final instance, it is known that he/she will be a staunch defender of the national institutions. The shadowy relationship of the larrikin with the establishment is shown in the long tradition of larrikinism in Australian literature from Louis Stone's *Jonah* to Frank Hardy's *Power Without Glory*. Something of the enigma of the truant is found, for example, in the story of the arch-larrikin Ginger Mick, in C.J. Dennis' "The Push." Early in World War I, Ginger Mick pointedly refuses to get himself killed in the fighting "so toffs kin dine/ On pickled olives . . ." (50). But, then, on the spur of the moment he changes his mind, signs up, and, in the muddy craters and fox-holes of the front, finds that the "toffs" he once hated are not such bad chums. He even calls some of them mates. By the end of Dennis's collection of poems, it is larrikin Ginger Mick's blood which stains the pock-marked hills of Gallipoli, and the reader finds that the British Empire has made and claimed the sacrifice of another "gallant gentleman." The larrikin/truant is Australia's, and Britain's, most loyal son.

The classification of truant fits Hasluck's profile as an writer particularly well, both in his public persona and in the project of his work. Hasluck's public image is tied to that of his conservative family. His father, Sir Paul Hasluck, served as a minister in the Menzies government, and was Governor-General of Australia from 1969 to 1974. Both the former Prime Minister Menzies, and the office of the Governor-General, bespeak conservatism. Sir Paul's wife, Alexandra, also grew up in a very conservative atmosphere, as outlined in her autobiography, *Portrait in a Mirror*. The establishment milieu of the family can further be seen in each of their writings: the poetry and historical memoirs of Sir Paul, and the historical works of Lady Hasluck. The tradition of a family of writers is a rather unusual distinction, which, as Max Harris points out, the Haslucks share in common with such distinguished literary families as the Brontës and the Brownings. However, the Haslucks possess a distinctiveness which puzzles Harris, for he muses:

What is it that has enabled Sir Paul, wife Alexandra, and son Nicholas Hasluck to each lay claim to major Australian literary reputations, yet with so little in common in the writing territories they have occupied?

("Haslucks: Literary Family of Distinction," 16)

In many ways the Hasluck family itself is an Australian institution. Nicholas, whom Harris describes in the 1984 article as "an impeccable model of your flourishing St George (sic) Terrace corporate lawyer," appears, like each of his parents, to also be an arch-conservative. But, such a image cannot contain Nicholas the writer. Quoting Harris again:

[Nicholas] is the family puzzle. Mild mannered Nicholas . . . enters a telephone box and emerges as Superfluent, the novelist with a vocabulary and dazzle that can be faster than a speeding epithet. (16)

This colourful description of Hasluck as a young writer highlights the truant nature of his work from its very beginnings. Hasluck's fictional themes, aberrant techniques and imaginative use of historical material are not those of a true conservative, but rather are the professional paraphernalia of the serious truant.

Nevertheless, Hasluck-the-writer is not truant for truant's sake, but is largely concerned with a certain form of truancy, and the purposefulness with which he tackles the issue is indicated by the choice of the title of his fifth novel, *Truant State*. In an interview about that novel with Veronica Brady, Hasluck-the-critic acknowledges that basically he is

conservative in a constructive sense. The notion of truancy is that at the moment when we step outside the accepted mode of conduct or the prevailing rules it is something less than a rebellion and something far less than a fully fledged revolt, but there is a sense of heightened awareness. In that stepping outside of the system . . . you will be looking at the system with a critical eye. So, yes, it is written from a progressive framework of mind but in a conservative mould, seeing the community as something which will evolve as opposed to something which has to be overthrown in order for reforms to take place. ("Just As it Was On the Goldfields," 51)

The question is, can Hasluck-the-writer-and-the-critic have it both ways – be both progressive and conservative? As a truant writer perhaps he can, for Hasluck-the-writer is not a revolutionary but a provocateur who disturbs the *status quo*. His books demonstrate the project of challenging ideologies through the disruption of genre. Hasluck-the-critic certainly dares to hope for a gentle accretion of reform through the medium of the pen. No doubt this is what Robert Hefner had in mind when he states in the *Canberra Times* that "Hasluck is the first to admit that his books are not fashionable, but he would be the last to admit that they're not relevant" ("Writer's Work," 18). The books may not be fashionable because Hasluck-the-writer is a truant, challenging and subverting popular conventions and forms of writing, but the books are relevant because in them he explores the contemporary nature of history, and the functions of law and literature.

Such truancy means that Hasluck's work defies generic classification. Bucking the rules, according to Claudio Guillen, has always been the style of some writers, and for them the strict popular genre has been "an invitation to reformulate and an invitation to reform" (quoted in *Genre*, 23). This, asserts Guillen, is the process of genre and "counter-genre." The deliberate act of ameliorating the genre becomes

the tool of the writer as an ideological reformer who, through disputing and changing the elements of the genre, questions the ideology which informs it and challenges its institutionalised narrative and discursive properties within society. Changing the genre does not simply challenge ideology through the internal themes of a novel, but it more subtly undermines the form of both the novel and the culture in which the ideology is buried. The culture is challenged through the disruption of what Todorov calls the common speech act at the base of the generic form, the very medium of communication through which society's meanings, values and judgements are made. It is with this in mind that Hasluck-the-writer's truancy can be seen as more than the disruption of the thriller genre alone, for the thriller is a Western genre, and one of the ideological institutions which Hasluck's work constantly challenges is Western history – the politically selective story which the West tells of the past to build its own dominant sense of belonging and identity in the present.

## History

Part of the West's history of itself is the official history of Australia and, by extension, that of Western Australia. As a Western Australian writer, Hasluck's truancy is particularly aimed at the narration of the state's history, which he conveniently sets within the context the Western Australia's own truant acts against the Commonwealth of Australia. Western Australia's truancy is a theme common to many of Hasluck's novels: the aptly-named *Truant State*, *The Blue Guitar*, *The Country Without Music*, *The Blosseville File* and *A Grain of Truth*. Western Australia, the larrikin state, is not in serious revolt against the Australian Federation, but has an interdependent relationship with it like that of delinquent child to parent. *Truant State* is based on fictional representations of the officially recorded history of the secession movement of the 1930s, while *The Blue Guitar*, published in 1980, is a harbinger of the heady entrepreneurial days which were experienced in Perth in the following decade. These stories are set in known geographical places, such as Perth, Kalgoorlie, Northcliffe and Busselton, and the recognisable spacio-temporal dimensions are used by Hasluck-the-writer to



interrogate the larrikin and truant nature of Western Australia and its society. These places provide a verisimilitude of place in the “mystery-thriller” novels.<sup>8</sup>

However, in his last three novels, *The Country Without Music*, *The Blosseville File* and *A Grain of Truth*, Hasluck-the-writer does not rely on recognisable historical and geographical spaces, but rather sets his work in an invented geo-historical space. The implied setting common to these novels is one of long-term settlement by France of two islands off the Western Australian coast. The islands are inhabited by Creoles who have a tradition of French culture and history dating from the era of the French Revolution, for Hasluck-the-writer, the intellectual larrikin that he is, has broken with Western Australia’s proud tradition of a British heritage. In this speculative space the reader finds the uncanny juxtaposition of French and Anglo-Australian heritages, both in terms of history and ideology. In leaving the accepted institutionalised spaces of Western Australia’s history and geography behind, Hasluck’s stories themselves become truant, but do not, however, escape into the realms of pure fantasy or magic realism. Instead Hasluck-the-writer shapes a new space, formulating his own sense of fiction with its unique geo-historical space in which it contextualises itself. To establish the verisimilitude of his novelistic space, the writer develops imaginary, national discourses to which his characters respond. But, like the interdependence of the truant with the institution from which he has absconded, so Hasluck’s last three novels are interpretively dependent on the official, institutionalised geo-historical context of Western Australia.

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<sup>8</sup> The critics disagree on the location of *The Blue Guitar*, for while most agree the novel has a “verisimilitude of place,” they contest which place is meant. Veronica Brady, in “The Novel as Anti-Fiction,” sees the city in *The Blue Guitar* as “recognisably Sydney” (12). Helen Daniel, in “Morality and Survival,” describes the setting as a city anywhere. Richard Johnstone, in “Unexplored Country,” believes the setting is Perth (67), as does Frank Tuohy, in “Things as They Are.” On its re-release in 1989, both Robert Hefner, in “Writer’s Work . . .” (18), and Cassandra Pybus, in “But Play You Must” (167) link it to Perth and the 1980s Rothwells debacle. In a review-cum-interview Duncan Graham and Hasluck himself make the same inferences about Perth and the Rothwells connection in “A Lawyer in Love With Words” (9). In an earlier interview with Candida Baker, Hasluck again indicates the Perth setting for this novel (*Yacker*, 176). Perhaps the final word is the reference to Dyson Garrick, the protagonist in *The Blue Guitar*, who is a long term resident of Blosseville (Perth) in *A Grain of Truth*.

The emphasis on history in Hasluck's work shows that truancy may be at work in genres other than the dominant genre of the novel. Thus, the dominant generic norm may provide only one interpretation, and the text may, in fact, consist of multiple intersecting genres. Recognising the presence of multiple genres in literary texts leads Dubrow to speak of the main genre as a "host genre" (116), which functions to free other generic forms to operate and play in ways different than they might if they constituted the paramount genre. Hasluck-the-writer, working in the domain of the truant, skilfully uses such techniques to further expose and challenge the ideological assumptions underpinning society.

In *The Bellarmine Jug*, for instance, the host genre of the mystery-thriller allows an internal genre of history to function. This internal genre does not operate in the orthodox way of a historical text, but builds an entirely speculative history around multiple historic intersections, including such incongruent elements as Rosicrucianism, the *Batavia* mutiny, the Cold War and the infamous MI5 defections in Britain, the Indonesian independence movement and nuclear testing on the Monte Bello islands off the Western Australian coast. Hasluck-the-critic writes, concerning the shaping of official history in *The Bellarmine Jug*, that

the past is portrayed as a continuous and unsettling force which, like a gravitational field, is able to upset the characters' preconceptions about the present and the future. The quarrel between truth and deception is projected as a recurrent cycle, unpleasant perhaps, but human, and timeless. ("The Past's Deceitful Dream," 124)

Throughout *The Bellarmine Jug*, Hasluck-the-writer constantly mixes and rearranges histories of nations and historical periods of time. He hypothesises, and fills historical gaps with a mixture of pure fantasy and speculative history.

However, although *The Bellarmine Jug* develops elaborate speculative spaces and themes, as indicated earlier, it is primarily read as a mystery-thriller and not as a historical novel. But, by reading the novel only as a thriller, most critics have largely neglected the historical implications of the novel. This lack of analysis by reviewers reinforces Max Harris' statement in the *Weekend Australian*, that "it is

conventional wisdom that fiction reviewers are heavy on pronouncements and short on analytics” (6). Certainly Australian reviewers of Hasluck’s work sustain Dubrow’s observation that “the host [genre] may assume the function of a screen, hiding or counter-veiling certain less desirable aspects of the genre within it” (116). What is screened in Hasluck’s work is the play with history, democracy and the liberal humanist conventions of Australian and Western society. In his novels Hasluck-the-writer ventures into realms of speculation orthodox historians could never consider, even pondering the effects of the present in the future. In *The Bellarmine Jug*, for example, a retired lecturer from the Grotius Institute ruminates:

The future is a distant country. Its inhabitants are shouting at us but we cannot hear them. Everything they say is beyond us. We are bombing their cities, destroying their fields, polluting their water. We are marching through their villages. They weep, they wring their hands, they fall on their knees. We stare at them blankly, and move on. We can’t turn back.  
(257)

Living in the present, the past is a “deceitful dream,” the future is a “distant country.” All is play, and nothing is sacrosanct in the writer’s quest to disturb, challenge, and momentarily displace the thinking of the reader.

One critic and writer on Australian literature who more than most recognises some of the challenges in Hasluck’s work is Helen Daniel. In *Liars: Australia’s New Literary Fiction*, she singles out a number of contemporary Australian writers, claiming they are writers of a “New Fiction” in which the lies they knowingly fabricate tell us more about truth than the “realism” of conventional writers of fiction.

All fiction is invention. Sometimes the realism persuades us of its truth. Sometimes we are duped by its untruth. Some writers play on our disbelief. These are the Liars, celebrating the artifice of fiction. The Liars are flaunting the lie. (Daniel, 4)

Hasluck, along with others such as Peter Carey, David Ireland and Elizabeth Jolley, is on Daniel’s list of those who flaunt lies, celebrating the fictionality of

truth as it is laid bare in the truthfulness of fiction. Such truth, like fiction, is always shifting, unable to be pinned down, and so it is threatening and challenging to any stable notions of reality. As Daniel states in "Moral Thrillers," to Hasluck "truth is insurrectionary . . . undisciplined and disorderly" (12), for in a narrative construction, truth itself, whether in the pretensions of orthodox histories or in the play of fiction, is a lie, often hybrid and politically motivated in nature. The constructedness of truth applies to all the institutions of Western society, and through his "flaunting of the lie" Hasluck-the-writer makes the reader aware of the common link between the fictionality of literature and both the supposed "reality" of history and the "virtue" of the law.

### **Literature and the Law**

The law is also a major area of lies and deception, truancy and play, in Hasluck's work. The ideology of Australian and Western society projects the law as an institution which is aloof, impartially just and truthful. While this may bring a sense of structure and security to society, Hasluck-the-writer exposes the gaps, irregularities and transgressions to be found in the ideologically-driven narratives of the law. As a writer who also practises law, he demonstrates that aspects of the law function in a "literary way," constructing fictional narratives which seek to convince an audience, such as a jury, or a judge, of their authenticity. The connection between the literary and the legal, which is often ignored in everyday life, is a motif in Hasluck's writing, for, in a reflection on his work Hasluck-the-critic states his position, that "in a number of my books, novels in particular, I have attempted to bridge . . . the gap between the legal mind . . . and the literary intelligence" ("Imprudent Friends," 102). He further suggests that there is a narrowness and lack of imagination in the contentions of the legal world, as well as a murkiness and self-deception in the illusions of the literary mind, and he seeks to cross-pollinate these two discourses in his work. In addition, it can be reasoned, the juxtaposition of law and literature serves a further purpose, for the critique of the law as one institution amongst many in society highlights the often deceptive

concept of the “immutability” of the law and its apparent elevation to a moral height from which it appears to have the right, and duty, to judge all others.

*A Grain of Truth*, for example, demonstrates that, in spite of the law’s pretensions, lawyers do not have a unswerving regard for the truth but use a constructed story to convince juries and persuade judges to pass sentence on the accused. As the narrator elaborates:

To those in the legal system who are trained to respect coherence and chronology – the right order – a true story had certain hallmarks: facts that could be substantiated, a narrative that was internally consistent, an ending that fitted in comfortably with the situation first described, no blots or unruly meanings left between the lines, all ends tied up neatly.

Thus, truth and lies, it could be argued, because they each require shaping, skill in choosing details, were both fabrications – as flimsy as potato chips. (223-24)

The work of the lawyer, like that of the novelist, is not so much the relating of absolute truth, but rather the construction of a narrative which has a convincing appearance of truth (verisimilitude). Hasluck-the-writer’s interest in the nature and function of truth in the law and literature is reflected in *Quarantine*, *Truant State*, *The Bellarmine Jug*, and *A Grain of Truth*, for each of these novels has either a practising lawyer, or a law student, as the narrator or protagonist – except for *Truant State* in which the narrator is a journalist.

The inability of the law to furnish the truth is not always readily acknowledged in legal circles. The journalist/narrator in *Truant State* has a keen interest in the narrations and interpretations of history and memory, but when he asks a lawyer friend if he has read the works of D.H. Lawrence, the legal man replies, “Lawyers don’t have time to read. Except for law reports. We’re far too busy. . . . We’re right at the centre of things. What’s happening is what we do” (151). The unreflective, non-critical outlook of the lawyer who claims to be at the centre of the processes of society is challenged by Hasluck-the-writer who exposes him as having a lawyer’s typically blinkered view of the world, both experientially and

ideologically. Hasluck's novels constantly interrogate the claims and notions of lawyers showing how such ideological beliefs have an impact on the operation of the law, and so affect the everyday lives of ordinary Australians.

*Quarantine*, too, is particularly concerned with the relationship of human society and the law. The narrator, an aging law lecturer remembering his student days, is a strong advocate of jurisprudence, the study of the science, or philosophy, of law, which in its early Roman form was not only an attempt to create a common law, but was also a means of holding the vast empire together. The lecturer acknowledges his dated concern with jurisprudence in writing to his colleague, for he asks,

Would you ever betray me? Circulate this manuscript? Pass it around the younger members of the faculty who already regard me as an anachronism; the new breed of lecturers who say that jurisprudence is out of date, a soft option, having less to do with life than probate planning and variable trusts. (43)

He later sums up his reason for his passion for jurisprudence to his colleague and friend:

Do you know why I have argued so passionately, so extravagantly, and on so many occasions, often to the prejudice of my own case, to the detriment of my own reputation, that unless we are preparing students for independence of thought and action, their minds fortified by history, philosophy, the lessons of the past, our work is wasted? (177)

Such an ideal of independent thinking based on a knowledge and appreciation of the classical literature of the Western tradition is typical of the liberal humanist framework which sees Western thought and philosophy as the means of enlightenment for all humankind. Whether this framework is good or bad Hasluck-the-writer doesn't say, but he is critical of the law's failure to realise that in its reading and interpreting of texts it needs to appreciate the wider dimensions of literature and literary interpretation. Only with such an appreciation can lawyers take themselves less seriously and realise the compromised nature of all productions of meaning.

The contest for the production of meaning in the law is also a major theme in *The Bellarmine Jug*. When Leon arrives at the Grotius Institute, an international school devoted to postgraduate study in international law, he has high ideals and expectations. As Helen Daniel puts it, “Leon yearns for a simple moral code with which to confront a simple reality, where the moral signposts are clearly emblazoned” (“Moral Thrillers,” 12). He is looking for liberal humanist values, but instead, he finds an institution which appears willing to compromise itself. In the aftermath of the Second World War, Leon hears a former tutor at the academy being quoted as saying “that war leaves behind a minefield of dangerous rules and senseless order” (21). Van Riebeck, the Warden of the Institute, in his long discussions with Leon, states that “previous generations were taught to read. This generation must learn to read between the lines. . . . human affairs are too complicated to be governed by a single set of principles” (127). This disrupts Leon’s traditional view of the law as universally upholding the principles of truth at all cost.

The librarian, Niesmann, further interrogates Leon’s ideals when he poses the question: “What is truth when you have a melting pot of cross purposes?” (141).

Niesmann states that:

Truth will always be conditioned by the context. There is the lawyer’s truth – a painstaking attention in the courtroom to what exactly happened and in what order. But against that must be weighed the truth of the situation as a whole. What made things happen? What is the root cause, the emotion behind it all? The questions lawyers never seem to bother with. Indeed, bound by their technical rules, the questions they congratulate themselves on never asking. They like to skate about on the surface. Let them. But for some of us there is another world; a world we can’t help wishing to explore, a world of fables and misconceptions. Why should we proceed as if the world of reason annihilates the other? . . . Illusions linger in some minds longer than a formal verdict. The imagination wanders off on its

own path. The state of a man's mind is as much a fact as the state of his bank balance. (141)

The law fails to acknowledge the power of the imagination. Furthermore, the law, with its claim to logic and reason, is as selective and fabricated in its narrations as literary fictions, but it is less honest than the literary world about the fictional nature of its pretensions and constructedness.

The power of the imagination is pursued further in *The Bellarmine Jug* when truth itself becomes fictional, relative and constantly changing. Leon's tenacity, which keeps him pursuing the cause of the mysterious events long after the interest of others has waned, is driven by his belief that if one party, such as the student Martin Aveling, is right, then the other party, such as Van Riebeck, must be wrong. Moreover, if the party who is wrong refuses to acknowledge his error, then he is evil and totally corrupt. Leon, positioned in the legalistic mind-set of justice and truth, cannot entertain the possibility of multiple, shifting narratives of truth and justice.

Opposed to Leon are the concepts of Van Riebeck and Niesmann. The two men, as long-time employees of the Institute, and as old friends and comrades-in-arms, are most concerned about their reputations: their reputations are the Grotius Institute's reputation, and the Grotius Institute is to them what Western civilisation is all about. Much rests on the honour of Hugo Grotius, the Institute's namesake, who is considered to be the father of international law. Van Riebeck and Niesmann seek to maintain the reputation of the institution, and they appear to succeed in their efforts, for Aveling is expelled, and, in spite of the anarchy of the students, Van Riebeck remains the Warden. Van Riebeck admits to the compromised nature of the law, but uses that admission to show the need for strong decision-making and the necessity of scapegoats, such as Aveling, to maintain the stability of the stronger party or the status quo. He employs his position and reputation to uphold the integrity of his position and reputation. The play between the projected image of the Institute and the actual forces and decisions which drive it make that projected image a myth. What produces meaning in the institution of the law varies



according to the intentions and interests of the persons concerned. What is valued has more to do with reputation, power and self-interest, rather than with justice, truth and integrity. The accepted, singular orthodox view of the law is displaced, through the exposure of a double play or double standard, into a sectarian, multi-faceted, disturbing view, in which no party, or voice, is given the privileged, valued status of being right.

Leon vents his anger against the shifting truth in the multiple narratives at the Grotius Institute, and rages against his inability to extract the justice he feels must be met to satisfy his concept of the duty of the law. He turns to Walter Chapman, sensing that as a British compatriot who understands the British ideals of fairness and truth he will support him in the rights and the wrongs of the situation. But, ironically, Walter is a Russian mole. When Leon accuses Van Riebeck of being worse than Jeronimus and the mutineers on the *Batavia*, Van Riebeck responds by saying that “there will never be justice, no matter how you fix things up” (176). Van Riebeck, the villain, rather than Leon, the hero, is aware of the compromised nature of the truth and the inevitable need for believable fictions in matters concerning the institutions of truth, justice and the law.

While Hasluck’s work shows how history and the law have features which are similar to the fictional nature of literature, it also exposes literature’s attempt to contrive a sense of the real. Through his narratives Hasluck-the-writer shows how literature, although it seeks to mimic the lived world, undergoes constant change in the way its subject matter is perceived and interpreted. Even Hasluck’s books themselves are subject to such change, for with the passage of time the manner in which a piece of literature is read alters as the cultural and contextual understandings of the readers change. The meanings also alter depending on the external intertexts the reader draws upon, and this effect is heightened by internal intertextuality as the text is read and reread. Within Hasluck’s texts, however, the narrative’s own attempts to portray reality are laid bare through generic conventions constantly being pushed and challenged to their limits.

## Literature

In challenging and pushing the genre's limits, Hasluck-the-writer's commitment to truancy again becomes evident as he seeks to unsettle the ideological construction of the novels by defamiliarising, to the reader, a number of literary conventions. One example from *The Hand That Feeds You* is the insertion of several "tear-out" literary reviews for the critic to choose from at the end of the novel. He includes one "mildly favourable review," one "mildly critical review," and one described as "a 'real stinker' . . . favoured by the waspish critics who had never had much stomach for reading and were now working entirely by touch" (179-81). The writer, composing his own reviews, usurps the conventions of the relationship between the novel and the critic. But through this breaking of the assumptions of the code "a writer can induce in his reader a series of intellectual reflections and emotional experiences very like those being enacted in and by the work itself" (Dubrow, 37). In the future Australia of *The Hand That Feeds You*, people seek to maximise their government handouts while at the same time doing nothing to jeopardise their unemployment allowance. Similarly, with the writer's kind help, the critics of the novel do not have to work, and so, like the characters in the novel, do not have to forego social security payments. The prepared reviews at the end of *The Hand That Feeds You*, then, satirise, in a very practical sense, the ideal of Australia's institutional welfare net. Furthermore, the presence of the pre-written reviews creates in the reader a feeling of dislocation and absurdity similar to that experienced by Dee, the protagonist, as, after a long period of absence, he returns to the Australia of the future. Moreover, Hasluck-the-writer doesn't just disrupt the critics, but parodies the concept of "the death of the Author" through exposing his own role as writer, discussing at length the authorship of the book, suggesting that the evidence shows it was written by a committee rather than a single author. The intense playfulness in the text demonstrates the seriousness with which he plays with literary conventions, disrupting and challenging the very building blocks of the literary process.

Another literary convention, which has previously been described, is defamiliarised in the concluding paragraphs of *Truant State*, for closure of the mystery is suspended as Hasluck-the-writer uses the shock tactic of switching the narration from the first-person to the second-person, so the final events are happening to “you,” the reader. You suddenly realise you are to be the victim of the murder. “You” are to be killed. In the darkness you can make a split-second guess as to the conclusion of the who-dun-it, but, hypothetically, because you are a character about to be killed, you will never really know the identity, or the motive, of the murderer. Once again Hasluck-the-writer usurps the mystery-thriller’s generic convention of closure which allows all to be finally revealed. This playfulness makes the reader very conscious that the writer is well aware of the devices and conventions of the medium he is using.

Similarly, *The Bellarmine Jug* develops around a mystery, which in part is solved at the end of the novel, but closure is refused by the literary device of turning the novel just narrated into a novel within a novel. Thus both the verisimilitude and the antiverisimilitude typically characteristic of the thriller story is contested, in that the narrative openly admits to becoming a novel written by the protagonist, who has written himself into the story as a character constituted in the third-person. The “he” of the story is, in fact, writing the story and so the verisimilitude of the fiction is displaced into a second level of fiction. The displacement reveals the falsity of the verisimilitudes of the first story and thus questions generic assumptions, structure and apparent closure. This exposure and challenge to the verisimilitude and antiverisimilitude of the mystery-thriller genre reveal Hasluck-the-writer’s ability to highlight the supplementary world created by generic limitations which functions to allow a masked, seductive appearance of reality to carry the reader along, lulling him or her into a false sense of material truth. The text’s refusal to abide by literary conventions may be disconcerting to many readers, but it reveals the normally unacknowledged split, the point of fissure between the lived world and the domain of the literary. Furthermore, because of literature’s links to all narrativised discourses in society, such as history and the law, the exposure of literature’s constructedness calls into question the assumptions

behind the “truth” of all discourses. Hasluck-the-writer’s examination of, and preoccupation with, these fissures combine the seemingly antagonistic traits of the larrikin and the ideological reformer within the body of the truant.

Thus the blending of the larrikin and the ideological reformer allows Hasluck-the-writer a space in which to speak, albeit a conservative space. In Hasluck’s work the conservative questioning of society’s apparent truths within the constructs of the thriller which developed out of the detective genre as defined by Todorov, seem to fit his purpose to a certain extent. The truancy of the genre appears to be more important to Hasluck-the-writer than conformity to the popular type. For this reason, it is his deviation from the generic norm which provides the most helpful reading through the paradigm of the thriller genre. Furthermore, it is the multiple lesser genres, hidden by the dominant host, or thriller, genre which allow a wider appreciation of Hasluck-the writer’s criticism of the narratives of our society. Thus, overall, Hasluck’s novels form an uncomfortable fit with the thriller genre, so that any reading of them through this construction remains a little forced and somewhat unsatisfactory.

It could be argued, however, that a different reading of the thriller genre, besides the account by Todorov, could form a better framework for interpreting Hasluck’s work. One such possibility is the Marxist interpretation of the thriller elaborated by Jerry Palmer. Contextualisation, which takes into account both history and social change is important in Marxist readings, and, as indicated earlier, these two factors are important issues in Hasluck’s work. Palmer’s explanation of the emergence of the thriller, then, may provide, for some readers, a preferred reading of the nuances in the Hasluck oeuvre, as it focuses on the ideological constructs behind the formation of the genre.

## Chapter 2

**The Negative Thriller Genre: Marxism and Paranoia**

*But to write down the tale  
is to open up a Pandora's Box  
full of doubts and misgivings.  
(The Country Without Music, 84)*

As argued in Chapter One, the mystery-thriller provides a common framework through which most of Hasluck's work has been consistently read by critics, and it is, at the same time, a generic form which Hasluck-the-writer subjects to sustained attack and constant disruption. Hasluck's challenge to the genre is not piecemeal, but follows a particular pattern which can be read better through a slightly different generic paradigm derived from a Marxist reading of the thriller genre. This framework concentrates on the ideological roots of the mystery-thriller as it seeks to mediate between the incongruities found in capitalistic society. It is the reading expounded by Jerry Palmer in *Thrillers: Genesis and Structure of a Popular Genre*.<sup>9</sup> In this chapter, Palmer's ideas will be used to develop this alternative interpretation of Hasluck's work, whereby genre is understood to be a reading practice which is a function of the sociological conditions which have produced it. As such it is an ideological tool which manufactures, or facilitates, meaning and harmony, covering the inevitable gaps and fissures which are generated by the dynamics of continuous change within society. The key fissure within capitalist society, which is covered over by the mystery-thriller, is the gap between the notions of the individual and society.

The typical mystery-thriller, according to Palmer, is usually characterised by a threatening conspiracy, a strong element of paranoia, and society's return to its

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<sup>9</sup> Palmer's book was published in 1978, when Marxist literary theories were at their height in Western academic circles. Today, ideologically-driven Marxist readings appear dated, but while the Marxist context of Palmer's work is problematic, he does provide some interesting insights into the thriller genre through this alternative reading.

former status through the timely and extraordinary exploits of a gallant hero. Hasluck's novels, however, as has already been argued, differ from the typical thriller: the threatening element of paranoia is minimal; the narratives are driven more by the inner struggles of the heroes than by the menace of a dangerous conspiracy; the protagonists are mostly weak and ineffectual; and, finally, the evil forces which confront society are not successfully crushed but are left intact, so that the dilemmas of society remain unresolved. These characteristics of Hasluck's novels are similar traits to a thriller variation which Palmer calls the "negative thriller." While the typical mystery-thriller performs the function of offering a mediatory ideology which allows the capitalist establishment to triumph in an unquestioned manner, the negative thriller constructs the world as an ambiguous place, where threatening ideologies and ideals are exposed but are never disposed of, challenged but never overthrown. This variant of the mystery-thriller, as expounded by Palmer, is a slightly different yet possibly more productive way to read some of Hasluck's novels, for, in many ways, the negative thriller fits closer to both the literary structure and the ideological play within some of his texts. But before it is possible to argue for the negative thriller, we must first establish Palmer's concept of the parent genre – the mystery-thriller.

### **Palmer and the Mystery-Thriller**

As has been argued, Todorov, as a structuralist, has read the mystery-thriller genre from a socio-linguistic point of view, but Palmer, as a Marxist, perceives the same genre from a socio-historical perspective. Theorists such as Jacques Lacan and Mikhail Bakhtin have reasoned that language is a social act, and that, conversely, all social meaning must have a linguistic base. Historical interpretation is a part of social meaning, so the interdependence of the linguistic, the social and the historical means that Todorov's linguistic and Palmer's historical ways of reading the thriller genre are in many aspects complementary. This can be seen, for example, in the similarity between the speech act behind the detective novel and the structure of a history text, for the "who-dun-it" is structured around the

detective's interpretation of a set of forensic clues, while a history text is assembled from a historian's interpretation of a set of historical "clues."

Todorov and Palmer, however, do differ on some crucial points about the thriller genre. For example, Todorov dates the emergence of the thriller after the Second World War, while Palmer argues for an earlier beginning, asserting that the thriller sprang out of the changing ideology of the Industrial Revolution. Palmer links the thriller's development to three other genres: the heroic romances of the knights in shining armour; the Gothic tales of triumphant supernatural evil; and the police memoirs and popular broadsheets of horrifying crimes. Palmer contends that these three genres merged when an alteration in the perception of criminal law permitted a new dimension of public and social crime to develop. The individual, competitive nature of modern economics allowed the possibility of a criminal conspiracy against society, and its corollary of the super-sleuth, or super-hero, to materialise. The preoccupation of the mystery-thriller genre with the maintenance of harmony and the continuance of capitalistic society is clearly discernible in the ironic observation that while the hero sees him/herself as morally superior to the materially successful and pampered bourgeoisie which he/she is contracted to defend, he/she usually accepts a very high payment for those services, and is often quite accustomed to the bourgeois lifestyle him/herself.

It can be seen, then, that just as Todorov contends from his socio-linguistic paradigm that genres change with language, so Palmer from his socio-historical view maintains that genres change with the shifting ideologies of society. In the case of the thriller, the ideological change which gave it form, argues Palmer, was the rise of capitalistic ideology in the Industrial Revolution. Thus the advent of the hero of the thriller coincided with the emergence of the competitive individual of capitalist society – the society which displaced the communal, agrarian-based feudal system. The fracture at the heart of capitalistic society, between the competitive individual and the society which forms and nourishes that individual in his/her success, is the ideological gap which the thriller seeks to resolve or disguise.

The conventional, Western narrative of the rise of capitalism tells how the momentous onslaught of the Industrial Revolution, with the development of mechanisation and the advent of steam power, broke down the ancient social fabric of village life as people were swept into newly-formed industrial urban centres. In spite of the Luddite revolt, the mechanisation continued at a great pace in the agricultural, manufacturing, mining and transport industries. In the increasingly urban landscape, labourers had to individually compete for work against fellow labourers, and employers needed to individually compete for markets in an expanding worldwide trade network. Thus the whole of society, including the agrarian communities, moved onto a new structural base, the foundation of which was individual competitiveness. This process brought social upheaval, alienation and individualisation on a scale unimagined before.

Other changes came with the Industrial Revolution, such as the rise of the modern police force, which eventually needed support from the public coffers rather than from the private purses of the emerging middle class. This meant that the investigation and pursuit of criminals became a matter of public policy. As a result of this, along with other parallel modifications, the values of society itself were transformed, so that what was once considered of private concern shifted into the public or corporate domain. Before the Industrial Revolution, crimes against property were private matters, while crimes against person, such as rape and murder, were public concerns seen to be against society and against God. But with the Industrial Revolution and the rise of the wealthy new aristocracy, the laws, and the perception of the laws, were changed so that crimes against property also were seen to be perpetrated against the public and against society, and thus crimes against property became the business of governments and their public police forces. With this transformation in perception, it became imaginable to conspire against society in perpetrating crimes against property, and a series of property crimes could become a threat to the very fabric of society itself – a criminal conspiracy. The maintenance of the rights of the propertied, entrepreneurial, wealthy individuals of the Industrial Revolution, then, became the concern of the public law



enforcers, the preservation of the interests of the wealthy even being equated with the maintenance of a healthy society.

It is these changes, claims Palmer, in capitalist society's perceptions of crime and policing which form the basic framework for the mystery-thriller. The two major elements of the thriller, according to Palmer, are, firstly, some form of a conspiracy against society (usually in the form of a threat to the interests of the wealthy) and, secondly, the competitive individual (that bourgeois capitalist and his agent – the private, professional detective). Thrillers which illustrate these elements of conspiracy and the individual hero include the popular series of the intrepid duo Batman and Robin, the amazing exploits of Superman, and the sophisticated stunts of the ever-dashing James Bond. The threat against society in the thriller comes from a malevolent villain, such as the Penguin or Lex Luther, whose evil designs loom ominously over society, the conspiracy often being worldwide.

### **Palmer and the Negative Thriller**

However, the Marxist critique of the capitalist world view has challenged the simple notion of heroes and villains and has led to a questioning of the good-versus-evil dichotomy of the capitalist paradigm. Within the Marxist reading of society, “good” and “evil” are themselves seen as ideologically loaded terms, both of which are problematic. More often than not they are used as shorthand whereby “good” means the good of the bourgeoisie, and “evil” means anything which seeks to disrupt the capitalistic basis of society. Thus, through a strict Marxist reading of the typical mystery-thriller, the “good” the hero defends is the greed-driven, unjust interest of the merchant and ruling classes as they are assailed by the “evil” of those who would disrupt the profit-making processes of capitalistic society. This exposure of the ideology behind the mystery-thriller genre, asserts Palmer, is clearly seen in the emergence of the negative thriller.

The development of the negative thriller also saw changes in the close relationship of the hero to capitalistic society. As the meaning of “good” and “evil” defined by

the capitalist paradigm became less clear, so the status of the hero, in the eyes of the society he/she is to rescue, diminished. Furthermore, the narrative of good-versus-evil, with its element of conspiracy, is opened up to take many forms, as it does in Hasluck's work. For example, the ending of *The Bellarmine Jug* does not conclude with sweetness and light, but only with a pause in the battle against evil. Vice is not banished in an flourish of professional brilliance and personal courage. The war rages on. In fact, the reader may be unsettled by the realisation that if the conspiracy the hero seeks to destroy were to succeed, it would be no better/worse than the society the hero risks his/her life to save. The ethics of the hero and the villain are both called into question, and the conspiracy itself may have elements which are positive as well as negative. The reader is left with the impression that the things which are constructed as "good" may also be constructed as "evil," and vice versa.

### **The Conspiracy**

Furthermore, the conspiracies in Hasluck's work are not as forbidding as those of conventional, spine-chilling thrillers, because the problematising of "good" and "evil" in his novels is not only the concern of the reader but is a preoccupation of the text's characters. The narrators or protagonists usually have a vacillating conscience and they constantly philosophise about the moral issues raised by events and decisions. However, while the thriller aspect is diluted, sometimes appearing to be secondary to other themes and devices, the mystery/suspense element of the mystery-thriller is clearly present in some form in most of Hasluck's narratives.

In *Quarantine*, for example, the "evil" is an unknown force, or *faszad*, which seems to have a life and reasoning of its own, colluding with the changing circumstances and the hostile environment to imprison the passengers in the desert. *Quarantine*'s narrator describes a *faszad* as

a sordid intrigue. An intrigue so complicated by the variety of motives and false testimony required to bring it to fruition, that it might be described as a conspiracy without a cause; a chain of events bearing all the hallmarks of

a calculated plot – that is to say, a process which closes in on a victim, which seizes some unfortunate being against his will and breaks him, leaving him enmeshed in the ganglions of perjury and greed which brought his downfall – but nonetheless, a process which has no clearly defined purpose; as if the intention was simply to trigger off some iniquitous proceeding in the expectation that pickings of some kind or another would be there for nimble fingers in the end. (3)

Although the *faszad* is an Eastern concept, and *Quarantine* is the only novel Hasluck sets in the East, it becomes apparent that in Hasluck's writing the *faszad* is an ever-present force in all societies, for it is an uncontrolled element which reappears in later novels, such as *Truant State*, *The Bellarmine Jug* and *The Country Without Music*.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, the law is unable to restrain the *faszad*'s course, and the novels show that at its best the legal system is an ideological institution through which Western society can view the world with a kind of calm denial. The law enables the West to believe in structures and control while the *faszad* rages on, dictating the direction and outcome of human life. The passengers in *Quarantine* seek to fight against the *faszad* by bringing structure to their lives through committee meetings and by appointing a "hero" to investigate and make decisions on their behalf. The community at the quarantine station is insulated, cut off from the world, and so represents society in a microcosm. The menace of the "conspiracy without a cause" pervades the place, and its threat to the insulated community is felt by the reader, too, for he/she is drawn into the atmosphere of intrigue, and, like the passengers, is never told the reason for the quarantine. Burgess, the Englishman who tries to take control of the situation, is what Palmer would call "the bureaucratic hero," the one often represented by the police in thriller tales. His committee meetings, his endeavour to stand against individual action and his desire for group decisions, ironically, leads to inaction.

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<sup>10</sup> Helen Daniel develops the concept of the *faszad* connection across Hasluck's novels, defining it as a "Kafkaesque predicament." (See her articles "The Moral 'Faszad': The Novels of Nicholas Hasluck," "Moral Thrillers," and "The Case Against the Truth."). Hasluck-the-critic also sees his work as Kafkaesque, and the above definition of the *faszad* certainly has overtones of Kafka's "The Trial."

Furthermore, the narrator, nicknamed by the oafish Bricky and his mates as the “Professor,” is what Palmer would consider to be an “antihero” in that he is largely inactive and plagued with feelings of guilt and inadequacy concerning his legal training and his ability to act as a hero. In the last words of the novel, the narrator exclaims, “this intolerable *faszad*, this affliction – will there ever be an end to it?” (194). Although there is relief amongst the passengers that normalcy appears to have been restored, the haunting final cry of the book implies that for the narrator the threat of the inexplicable, unknowable will of the *faszad* remains. The conspiracy, or *faszad*, however, is neither “good” nor “evil,” evoking neither a strong sense of dread, nor a great sense of thrill. It is this sense of an inconclusive interregnum which leads Susan Kobulniczky to maintain that *Quarantine* “contains the right ingredients for a good thriller: mystery, suspense, murder, fear, jig-saw pieces of information”, but that the narrative, through its vacillating sense of “good” and “evil” in the mind of the narrator, never quite produces the suspense and fear of a conventional thriller (86). What appears most threatened in the novel is the Western passengers’ sense of stability and control, which, embedded in their notions of colonial mastery, must be exercised and maintained at all costs.

The ambiguous *faszad* continues in *The Hand That Feeds You*, but this time the *faszad* is complemented by the more direct, threatening, conspiratorial form of a big-brother government which oversees the Australia of the future. The directives which control people’s lives come from an unseen, remote source, which the majority of Australians appear to passively and implicitly trust. Those who resist are gently ground down until they, too, are eventually engulfed by the system, so becoming as complicit as every other Australian in the inequities and injustices of the nation. The threat conveyed to the reader is the danger of apathy and passivity in present-day Australia leading to the loss of current liberal democratic ideals, such as the freedom of choice and the rewarding of individual hard work. If these are lost, the text implies, in the future we will become the nightmarish Australia depicted in the satire.

In contrast to the novels already discussed, the conspiracy in *The Bellarmine Jug* is a complex fabrication which poses a serious threat to an honoured and strategic international organisation – the Grotius Institute. Due to the Grotius Institute's international character, the threat to the Institute also endangers the stability of international affairs. The secretive, conspiratorial nature of the Cold War, with the ominous spectre of the Communist Bloc seeking to outwit a “morally superior” West in the nuclear arms race, provides the overall context of good-versus-evil within the novel. However, once again, the Hasluck narrative fails to make any clear distinction between the “good” of truth and the “evil” of falsehood, within the institutions of the law and of international affairs. International law is open to interpretation and, therefore, to manipulation, especially as morality and justice are equated with the interests of the strongest party. This blatant partiality of the legal system means that the law aligns itself with sectional interests which have political clout, is prejudiced against certain races, and is selective in the attribution of truth to different events and circumstances. For example, the East-Asian cultures in *The Bellarmine Jug* are characterised as unstable and actively aligned with the evils of Western culture. Their collusion with Western depravity is seen, for example, in the bigotry of the Rosicrucian religious movement which penetrated Eastern Java in the thirteenth-century, and the savagery of the *Batavia* mutiny which served to inspire the Indonesian independence movement's resistance to their Dutch overlords. In spite of this, however, the “hero” sides with the Indonesians in their fight against the Institute, or so it appears, for he is constantly faced with multiple choices between “good” and “evil” on both sides of the fracas.

This sense of conspiracy is added to by *The Bellarmine Jug* playing on the events of the McLean/Burgess affair in which Cambridge-trained intellectuals were recruited as Russian spies prior to, and in the wake of, the Second World War. In the 1960s a British Secret Service agent interviews Leon Davies, the protagonist, about the events of 1948. The agent is trying to find the identity of a mole who was at the Grotius Institute with the job to gather information on the plans for the 1952 British nuclear tests to be conducted on the Monte Bello Islands off the Western Australian coast. In one of many twists, which build the conspiracy by

merging speculative history with documented history, a clue to the identity of the mole at the Grotius Institute is given by Petrov to the Australian authorities after Petrov's defection.

Van Riebeck is the Warden of Grotius Institute, and his reputation, as well as that of international law, is put in jeopardy by the events at the Institute in 1948. As often happens in nebulous conspiracies, a scapegoat is sought and the Sub-Warden, Toblen, is made to resign in order to shoulder the blame. In spite of the supposed conspiracy, therefore, the status of the institution is maintained, although several lives and reputations are sacrificed in the process. It could be argued, then, that the cost is minimal, for society is spared an uncertain, chaotic future which could have claimed many more lives. The truism the Institute constantly puts before the students is that "Justice is the interest of the stronger party" (6), and although Leon rails against this maxim, his actions prove the truth of the saying for he fails to win his battle against the Institute.

The conspiracy in *The Bellarmine Jug* spans both time and space, for it even extends to pre-settlement Australia. The Great Southland, much like the Australian student, Martin Aveling, whose name is expunged from the roll at the Grotius Institute, is relegated to being a victim, a scapegoat, removed from the main stage of the world. Aveling maintains that even in European history Australia was a passive victim, for there was a conspiracy to conceal its existence. He writes that "the Portuguese, anxious to preserve their dominion over that portion of the world assigned to them by Papal Donation, took steps to disguise their exploration of the Southland, also known as Terra Australis" (103). They distorted and falsified maps. In 1948, during Leon's time at the Grotius Institute, Leon believed the Dutch were similarly conspiring to conceal the existence of an appendix to Pelsaert's journal, using such tactics as misinformation, innuendo and the falsification of documents. Were the documents of the appendix real or planted? Were they lost, misplaced or secreted away? Even at the end of the novel there is no way of knowing what did or didn't happen, or the difference between truth and fabrication from either side. These ambiguities at every level affect the mind of

Leon, so that all categories of “good” and “evil” are qualified, and, once again the conventional power of the thriller is compromised.

In *Truant State* the “evil” is corporate greed, set within the framework of Western Australia in the 1930s.<sup>11</sup> The high-flying entrepreneurs conspire to take advantage of the newly-arrived migrants who wish to become part of the social scene of the local rich and leisured class. One such man, Henry Traverne, a doctor recently migrated from Britain, is left destitute when Romney Guy and the syndicate drain off his money for a project to empty the waist-deep Butler’s swamp. The conspirators, for reasons of personal expediency, are politically aligned with the West Guard, a secretive, right-wing organisation which casts a sinister shadow over events. The members of the Guard use violent, hardline tactics designed to generate fear in order to press their advantage. The West Guard appears to be based on the New Guard, a fascist organisation in New South Wales in the early 1930s, committed to opposing the popular leftist policies of Premier Lang (Russel Ward, 193-194). In *Truant State*, the West Guard is dedicated to the preservation of the liberal democratic principles of the Australian society in the 1930s. Paradoxically, however, the West Guard proves to be “as potentially disruptive as the lawlessness it was intended to guard against” (84). Even the rumour of its presence is enough to unsettle people.

In this amalgam of official and speculative history, *Truant State* presents the conspiratorial threat to Western Australian society as anything which might disrupt the opportunity of a person, rich or poor, to share in the new State’s wealth through capitalist enterprises. On this basis, “good” and “evil” are seen to oscillate between the camps of the privileged and the deprived. In the final analysis, however, the principal benefactors who make money out of the conspiracy are the privileged, wealthy entrepreneurs, whose consortium lasts only as long as there is money to be made. It is, most probably, one of their number who murders Stewart Lacey, and it is they who use the naivety of investors and the government to their

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<sup>11</sup> In Hasluck’s second novel, *The Blue Guitar*, the “evil” is similar, however, it is not conspiratorial, for it is perpetrated by an individual.

own personal advantage. The “hero” finds out these matters more by accident than by deliberate detective work, for, in the style of the negative thriller, he is not driven by high ethical standards or by a desire to expose, but is haunted by a sense of personal failure, of missing out on his own cherished desires for love and money in the exciting, heady days of the young state’s dramatic growth. Without shame he keeps switching sides. Again, the thriller aspect of the novel is diminished by the moral oscillations of the protagonist.

The “evils” in Hasluck’s last three novels, while conspiratorial, are more local in their scope. In *The Country Without Music*, a naive plot to overthrow the government of a couple of fictitious islands off the West Australian coast is woven through a historical saga told by a multiplicity of narrative voices. With each narrative voice the moral focus on what is “good” and “evil” changes, as does the apportioning of blame for the dissatisfaction on the islands. The conspiracy to overthrow the island’s administration is half-hearted and ineffective, the impotence of the revolution being highlighted in the narrative through its juxtaposition with the passion, idealism and butchery of the French Revolution. When the island’s administration is finally changed it is done through peaceful means, and the new government, headed by a former rebel, proves to be no better than the administration it replaces. Once again the boundaries between “good” and “evil,” as understood by the heroes and the villains, are indistinct.

The mainland across the straits from the islands is the setting of Hasluck’s eighth novel, *A Grain of Truth*. The events on the mainland take place many years after the revolutionary episode described above. The plot of the narrative revolves around the members of the law firm, Jeffcott, Carrick and Cheyne, who scheme to pervert the course of justice. They conspire to bend the truth in order to advance the personal ambitions of one of the new law partners – the “evil” deed being acquiesced to by the elder partner within the firm, even though it means the framing of an innocent man. Michael Cheyne, the least colourful, least important, member of the law partnership, finally decides to take a moral stand against the conspiracy which is permeating all aspects of the firm’s business. Michael, like



Leon in *The Bellarmine Jug*, opposes the “evil” of the conspiracy on high-moral grounds. But, in contrast to *The Bellarmine Jug*, *A Grain of Truth* takes a step towards some ethical resolution for the “better good,” for some strategic victory of “good” over “evil” is in sight at the conclusion of the narrative. However, Michael, the weak, mostly ineffectual, protagonist who oscillates between loyalty to the firm and his duty to do what is right, still has trouble distinguishing between “good” and “evil,” so once again the narrative functions as a negative thriller.

In summary, then, most of Hasluck’s work develops an element of conspiracy, although, more often than not, it is a subordinate device within the larger structure of the text. The weakness of the conspiracy themes is largely due to the problematising of the traditional paradigm of good-versus-evil in all the texts. Through challenging the traditional perceptions of “good” and “evil” as conventionally encountered in thrillers, the novels reveal that “evil” is a term society applies to agents or forces opposed to its dominant values. Thus these works, through disrupting the thriller and its ideologically-driven moral closure, challenge commonly-held societal values: whether morally in terms of “truth;” culturally in terms of the Oriental/Occidental divide; politically in terms of the Western and Communist Blocs; or socio-economically in terms of the capitalistic drive versus the welfare state. Through this ambivalence, which questions the moral dichotomies on which Western capitalistic society bases its meanings, securities and fears, the emotive power which drives the thriller is undermined.

## **Paranoia**

In the traditional thriller the electrifying, emotive aspect is most strikingly seen in the degree of paranoia generated in the text, for the entertaining, suspenseful component of the thriller is not so much the plot as it is the paranoia, the sense of threat against society, and, by inference, against the reader. Palmer states that rottenness in the thriller is something separate from the nature of the world, for rottenness infects the world. The paranoid perspective of the hero is that an evil contamination is about to engulf the world, and this belief generates an excitement

in the narrative which is shared by the reader, for the thriller proposes to the reader “that he too should see the world through paranoid eyes” (87). Palmer calls this element which drives and constitutes the thriller “paranoia-as-ideology.” It can be reasoned, then, that if ideology means a communal system of belief which informs action, then paranoia-as-ideology means a shared belief that the system is irretrievably in danger of destruction.

In Palmer’s Marxist view, the paranoia which has developed in the post-Industrial Revolution period concerns the working class who are seen as a constant threat to the propertied middle and upper classes. This is demonstrated by the gradual increase in preventative policing to a professional level where permanent surveillance of the working class can be achieved. Thus public policing has been concerned not only with the prevention of theft but also with the prevention of conspiracy, that is, any organised, subversive political activity which might disrupt society’s usual equilibrium. The higher the degree of malevolence in the subversive activity the greater the paranoia-effect. If the threat is sufficiently sinister, “paranoia-as-ideology” pervades the whole community and the public’s reaction against criminality becomes a unitary phenomenon, so that crime is seen as not against class but against society and seemingly against nature itself. Thus, asserts Palmer, the “thriller conspiracy is a pathological irruption into an otherwise ordered world” (201). What is important in the thriller, then, is the subversive nature of the conspiracy, and the degree of threat involved. The greater the degree of malignancy entailed, the greater the tension of the thriller.

Furthermore, in the thriller, the paranoia-as-ideology builds an atmosphere of conspiracy which can only be averted by the skill and daring of a single hero, for the sense of threat is so great that the reader is led to abandon trust in the usual systems which operate in the world they know. The paranoia can be such that even the small criminal conspiracy that will do anything to gain its ends is seen as the key to the breakdown of liberal European society, and this allows, of course, the solution that the thriller is capable of offering – courageous

intervention by one man who thereby saves the Western way of life.

(Palmer, 205)

Many of Hasluck's thrillers are built around small, localised conspiracies, but most significantly in terms of paranoia, all the novels have the characteristics of negative thrillers as opposed to the attributes of the more classical mystery-thriller. Thus, it can be seen that while the protagonists themselves are paranoid about the evil pervading their world, that paranoia is not necessarily shared by the reader because of the compromised nature of "good" and "evil." Paranoia-as-ideology is based on the degree of malevolence, and where "good" and "evil" merge, malevolence shifts and the intensity of the paranoia is lessened. The only novel which comes close to developing paranoia-as-ideology, where a "frightening" conspiracy touches the reader, is *The Bellarmine Jug*, but even there the paranoia is eventually qualified, and the malevolence is undermined by the constant shifts in moral boundaries.

In *The Bellarmine Jug*, Leon's simple desire is to uncover the forces behind the missing Pelsaert documents, which seem to be linked to the expulsion of Aveling and to the deaths of two Indonesians freedom fighters in the Netherlands. Leon's frustration and anger begins to show when he feels that, for some reason unknown to him, justice is being denied Aveling, and Leon's vehemence is directed at the Warden of the academy, Van Riebeck, and at the Grotius Institute itself, which he sees as evil, hypocritical and knowingly involved in subterfuge. The appearance of a cover-up drives Leon's paranoia to new heights. While other students give up the demand for truth, Leon believes a conspiracy is brewing, and he refuses to accept the Institute's explanation of events.

The Warden's apparent unconcern at the flexible nature of the law further angers Leon who clings to a traditional view that the legal system is unequivocally committed to upholding an essential morality which adheres to unquestionable principles of universal truth. Due to the way the events unfold at the Grotius Institute, both the reader and the hero share a growing apprehension at the injustices which appear to be perpetrated at the Institute, and together they sense a

widening gap between the philosophy taught and the actions carried out by the staff who teach in the honoured halls of an Institute dedicated to the principles of the law which supposedly uphold society.

Moreover, the deadly construction of the Cold War overshadows and controls the worlds of Leon and Aveling without their even being aware of it. Later, when the impact of the Cold War is public, historical knowledge, Leon comments to his interrogator, "I thought we were being haunted by the past. How could I know we were being haunted by the future?" (175). Throughout the novel, national narratives and their accompanying conspiracies and paranoias overlap, contest and adapt to each other, while behind the action it appears that they are all subject to the greater paranoia of the global conspiracy of the Cold War. But the Cold War, with its paranoia and ideology, does not dominate the main story of the novel. Instead it is revealed only through the process of Leon being interviewed by a British Secret Service agent, so that years after the events it is exposed as a meta-narration which is behind, and uses to its own advantage, all the other multiple narrations and intrigues at the Grotius Institute. The sense of subterfuge, deceit and paranoia, which the power struggle between national desires and ideologies creates, pervades the thriller narrative. The views and actions of Leon are despised by the Secret Service agent, who sees Leon as a dissident who calls into question the validity and predominance of the Cold War ideology.

The significance of the ideological positions which have driven the Cold War is referred to by Dennis Phillips, in *Cold War Two and Australia*, where he quotes Noam Chomsky as saying that the Cold War is not simply a confrontation, but "a highly functional system by which the superpowers control their own domains" (45). Part of the system of control used by the superpowers is paranoia, mainly generated by people and nations being kept uninformed, or misinformed. One passive, uninformed nation in *The Bellarmine Jug* is Australia, for it is presented as being submissive and vulnerable to the exploitation of European politics, even being used as an atomic testing site for European pretensions of power in the Cold War. In times of crisis, the threat of a communist invasion has constantly been

publicised to the Australian nation. Like Aveling in *The Bellarmine Jug*, Australia periodically makes loud, “principled” stands on various regional and international issues, but those stances are inevitably touched with the paranoia of conspiracy.

Although it is a thriller with international conspiracies extending from the Netherlands, to Britain, Australia and Indonesia, *The Bellarmine Jug*, like all of Hasluck’s thrillers, does not maintain the sense of threat which it initially builds. In the conclusions of *The Hand That Feeds You*, *Truant State*, and *Quarantine*, for example, the mysteries of the deaths/murders are left unsolved and the perpetrator of evil remains undetected and still at large. In each of the conspiracy narratives, however, some level of paranoia remains, fluctuating in its intensity until, in the end, it subsides to the rumble of a distant threat. It is at this point, where the paranoia is partially dispelled, that the features of the negative thriller come to the fore, and the ideology at the base of the thriller genre itself is subverted. In *The Bellarmine Jug* the production of the novel, and, therefore, the validity of its generic conventions and structure, is called into question when it is revealed that the book is a complex legal fiction written by students in honour of a lecturer who is retiring from the Grotius Institute. Similarly, in *The Hand That Feeds You*, the authenticity of the author is questioned, as to whether he is a stooge of the big-brother government at the heart of the book, or whether the book was simply written by a committee in order to gain a government grant. Taking seriously the postmodern challenge to authenticity, whether of the text or the implied author, the narrator mocks current literary trends by questioning the novel’s construction. In this way, a new type of “literary” paranoia is introduced, which aimed at the reader and the reader’s expectations can be more unsettling than the central paranoia of the narrative itself.

But the paranoia produced by changing the literary structure does not have the same intensity as paranoia in the traditional thriller. In all of Hasluck’s novels, the element of paranoia-as-ideology is compromised by the ambiguous nature of “good” and “evil” as characters vacillate between pursuing their heroic role and empathising with, and abetting, the villains. Leon in *The Bellarmine Jug* is not

alone, for the “Professor” in *Quarantine*, Dee in *The Hand That Feeds You*, Jack Traverne in *Truant State*, and Michael Cheyne in *A Grain of Truth*, are all examples of compromised and uncertain heroes who fight to preserve the best of a liberal, freedom-loving society whether they are being threatened by an international conspiracy or by a small-time intrigue.

### The Antihero

While Hasluck’s protagonists are uncertain heroes, they are still an important aspect of the novels’ generic construction, for, along with the conspiracy and its paranoia, the other major characteristic of all thrillers is the lone hero. Palmer maintains that in the mystery-thriller, the conspiracy, which may be small or world-wide, is met and overcome by the competitive individual, who, as a hero, is able to demonstrate competence and professionalism greater than that of his or her associates, and superior to that of the villain and his or her accomplices. The stand of the lone hero on behalf of society reveals the paradox which the thriller mediates and harmonises, for the narrative simultaneously contains the two seemingly contradictory notions in Western thought: the individual and society. Palmer explains the paradox, and the thriller’s role in harmonising its components:

[T]he combination of the two [in the thriller] permits the fictitious, ideological resolution of a contradiction that is fundamental to the conceptual system of which competitive individualism is a part, the contradiction between individuality and sociality. Thus we can say both that the two elements are transformed by their combination, because there is no a priori connection between them; and that their combination is motivated, and therefore by no means coincidental. . . .

Thus not only are the two fundamental components of the thriller drawn from the ideological field, but their association *in the form of the thriller* is part of ideology too. (149)

The thriller’s hero is simultaneously apart from and yet a part of society. This emphasis on both the individual and society is the unresolved fracture at the heart of all modern capitalistic societies. Perhaps its mediation of the fracture is the

reason why the thriller genre has continued beyond the conditions of its mid-nineteenth-century origins, for,

the thriller formula itself becomes a starting point for interpreting the world, and the original material out of which it was constituted can be discarded and another analogous set substituted, provided that it offers the same possibilities of a fictitious resolution of the contradiction between individuality and sociality. (Palmer, 205)

In lauding the individual competitive hero, the thriller fictionally resolves the contradiction to the benefit of individuality, but ironically, the reader is not aware that the triumphant individual is “entirely a social creation” (Palmer, 204).

Many of Hasluck’s protagonists fit the qualifications of the thriller hero, for, in their status as heroes, they are loners, standing competitively against the other characters and the institutions of society. They are also, as Palmer outlines, equally controlled by, and products of, the very institutions of society they challenge. However, Hasluck’s heroes are not the traditional legendary types. Instead, they are the antiheroes of the negative thriller. According to Palmer, the antihero of the negative thriller, like Raskolnikov in Dostoevsky’s *Crime and Punishment*, typifies “the tragic hero in European classical literature: a person more sinned against than sinning . . .” (43). A certain simplicity allows the antihero to remain naive, to maintain a rage against injustice and evil, and at the end of the narrative to be willing to begin again the same impossible battle against insurmountable odds. Furthermore, we do not see moral superiority in the antihero, nor do we feel greater outrage at the villain, for both the antihero and the villain resort to low and evil devices. The negative thriller is based not on “good” destroying “evil,” but on the concept of the “lesser evil,” so that as society returns from the paranoia of a malevolent threat to a relative equilibrium of normality, where the “good” outweighs the “evil,” even if only fractionally. The antihero, then, may do evil and violent deeds, but not as evil and violent as the villain who heads the conspiracy.

The narrator in *Quarantine*, for example, stands, at least in his own mind, against the apparent conspiracy behind the quarantine: the autocrat, Burgess; the disorganised schemes of the Egyptian, Shewfik; and the secrecy and reticence of the mysterious physician, Dr Margo, who refuses to inform the passengers of the true nature of the quarantine. The fact that the conspiracy is more in the minds of the main characters than in any specific event makes this novel largely an internal exploration of fear and guilt, the thriller mode being used to parody the internal human condition rather than the situation in the world at large. The “prof,” the passengers’ elected champion, in his role of trying to ascertain what is going on at the quarantine, is more of a reactive character than a pro-active hero. As a student, and later a lecturer, he is a socially constructed antihero – a product of the education system which enables him to question but not to act. Driven by his own guilt and sense of inadequacy, he bows to the wishes of anyone who is forceful with him, being controlled and used by Burgess, Shewfik and Dr Margo.

Dyson Garrick, the protagonist in *The Blue Guitar*, also typifies the oxymoron of a socially-determined individual. He is isolated, but unlike the narrator in *Quarantine*, he has an internal strength which enables him to mock his creditors and the inquisitive Hollins, the senior officer with the Companies Investigation Branch who is determined to dig up anything he can to drag him to the courts. Dyson is estranged from his indifferent wife; he moves in circles separate from his family; and he orbits in and out of his relationship with his sensuous girlfriend. Throughout the narrative he continues to alienate himself from everyone he meets. Although *The Blue Guitar* is more a moral thriller than a negative thriller, Dyson like the antihero in the negative thriller, is a compromised loner who is socially constructed, for he is driven by the demands of others, both in relation to meeting his financial obligations and in satiating his desire to be a survivor, whatever the cost.

Another loner is Dee, the antihero in *The Hand That Feeds You*. In this “political thriller” Dee’s isolation is similar to that of a Liberal Party member who inadvertently gatecrashes a Labor Party Convention. As an independent, expatriate



writer, Dee's political ideals show through in his willingness to take responsibility for himself, making his own way in life with as little interference from the government as possible. Thus, he initially epitomises the liberal democratic tradition of personal initiative and free enterprise, each citizen being able to improve his/her lot in life through hard work. But Dee has landed in a socialist Australia of the future which is the welfare state taken to unrestrained and bizarre proportions. Henry Meynard, the Australian hero who made Australia a Republic, has obviously been discarded from public life and only exists as a legendary figure (14). Dee, determined to find this lionised hero, tracks him down, but Meynard has become a demented old man, functioning as a tax deduction for a family. The Australian Republic has become a country governed by an unseen, powerful hand, and politicians, who are no longer democratically elected, have become even more despised in the eyes of the Australian public.

Initially, Dee stands alone against these changes, questioning the extremes of life in the suburbs of the forlorn city of self-serving citizens. But like a scene from a nightmare Dee is elected to a seat in Parliament, and in the tradition of the new world order is given cases of useless money (110). Underneath, however, Dee is an antihero, for he is still an "Australian" at heart, the seeds of the welfare mentality being embedded in his psyche. So, eventually, the loner allows himself to become dependent on the government subsidies which are an integral part of Australia's future society. Thus, by the end of the novel, after a half-hearted effort to resist the handout syndrome, he succumbs with a sense of the inevitable to becoming an equal participant in the super-welfare state. The social construction of the individual antihero is thus exposed through Dee's inability to resist the moral pressure society places upon him.

The antihero in *The Bellarmine Jug*, Leon Davies, never succumbs willingly to the influence of what he considers to be the controlling establishment. As a student, he goes to the Grotius Institute with the vision of being a part of the larger context of an international legal system which, he believes, supports truth against deception, and the rights of the weak against the strong. In the process of confrontation at the

Institute, however, Leon finds that his ideals isolate him from his fellow students and the staff, and he is thrown together with Aveling, who is either on the trail of an elaborate and dangerous cover-up, or is an eccentric who follows illusions of his own making. Leon, is initially drawn into events by chance, but, like the narrator in *Quarantine*, he is a product of an education system which teaches him to how to question rather than how to act, and which indoctrinates him to expect “good” to triumph over “evil.” Thus it is his ideological framework which drives him to try and uncover the apparent conspiracy which rages down the corridors of history as well as in the halls of the Grotius Institute. He finds, however, that he is limited, being driven and controlled by social and political events about him which he cannot fathom, let alone challenge. Leon’s vacillation between idealism and compromise shows him to be a socially constructed individual, and his uncertainty, powerlessness and inability to influence the train of events make him a classic example of an antihero.

The protagonist in *Truant State*, Jack Traverne, is also an antihero. He, too, like all thriller heroes, is a loner at heart. When he first migrates to Western Australia he finds himself being included in the popular-set, along with his father. The trend-setting group is controlled by Jack’s wealthy neighbour who has a good-looking, self-confident daughter, whom Jack finds very attractive. But, through various circumstances, Jack repudiates the in-crowd, is rejected by the neighbour’s daughter, and drifts away from his friends. Jack’s isolation is heightened by his dropping out of Teachers Training College, his unsuccessful attempts at keeping good jobs, and his perpetual failure in matters of romance. It is his constant failures, and his feeble oscillation between the popular, wealthy crowd and the people they have wronged, which cast him in the role of an antihero. Although a loner, Jack is a social being, controlled by memories, by the ideas and dreams of those he reacts against, and by his idealisation of the social constructs which surround the social life of Perth in the 1930s.

Loners also characterise *The Country Without Music*, which like *The Blue Guitar* is not a traditional negative thriller. *The Country Without Music*, however, does not

have a single antihero, but instead a number of narrators provide the text with multiple protagonists, all of whom are loners thrown together by the events and desires which sweep their lives. Jacqueline, for instance, with her French father and Ilois mother, is a culturally isolated person, not fitting in with either the indigenous Ilois, whom she supports in their push for independence, or the French-born elite with whom she lives and associates. Her isolation is complete in that she rejects and rebels against the authority of her uncle and her own family by joining the dissident Ilois, and then she, in turn, is rejected by the Ilois. Her uncle, who is also a narrator/protagonist in the novel, may actually be her father. He is the Administrator of the islands, and is a man isolated by both his history and his authority.

Another narrator/protagonist in *The Country Without Music* is Don Ryan, the Australian businessman touring the island with a delegation of Australian business people. He, too, is a loner. He does not have a good relationship with his wife, and the isolation between them is intensified when he tries to hide from her his romantic fantasies about Jacqueline. His desire for Jacqueline, and his bumbling attempts to woo her eventually climax in a callous rape, which serves to further isolate these two protagonists, destroying any relationship they may have had with each other. Don and the other Australians try hard to impress the islanders, but, in subtle ways, the Ilois and the French are constantly laughing at the Australians' oafishness. For example, the novel begins:

My uncle used to play a game with important people from the mainland [Australia]. After they had finished their business, he took them for a drive around the island and the last stop on the tour was always a visit to the old gaol. 'This may be of some interest to you,' he would say, as though the thought had just popped into his head. (3)

The game is to take the Australians into the derelict, overgrown prison, scaring them with the presence of the guillotine which was used to decapitate thousands of victims in the French Revolution. The Administrator takes photos of the Australians' fear-filled faces as they lie strapped horizontally on the grisly machinery. While the Australians see the visit as a serious outing of historical and

cultural significance, the uncle and the islanders mock and taunt them behind their backs.

However, in spite of the competitive nature of the protagonists in the novel, with their rival narratives and different interpretations of the same events, all the protagonists are trapped, both in their own inner isolation and in their relationships with each other, due to the cultural, political and historical differences which have shaped them. None wins over any other, for each is flawed in his or her own way. There are no heroes, only antiheroes. Although they are individuals, it can be argued through a Marxist reading, they are largely determined by the social constructions which function in and around them, and these constructs ultimately inspire the choices they make, so they have little option but to play out their flawed, socially-determined role on the pages of the text.

The isolation of the protagonists in *The Country Without Music* spills over into the following two texts which are situated in the same speculative environment. However, in *A Grain of Truth*, the protagonist, Michael Cheyne is not entirely alone, but gets some encouragement and support from Jane Bemis, a bright, young lawyer. The isolation Michael does experience is due to his long-standing position in the law firm and the stance he must take against a senior partner. Michael is an antihero, being weak and vacillating, dominated by other people in his life. He does, however, to everyone's surprise, make some moral choices by the end of the novel. Again, as a lone, competitive individual, who is separate from and often stands against a section of society, Michael is shown to be dependent on that society and its institutions for his formulation, and for the status of being cast in the role of an almost-hero who is still an antihero.

Thus all the protagonists, or socially constructed individuals in Hasluck's work, are antiheroes, flawed characters who contribute to the lack of dramatic intensity in the negative thrillers in which they participate. Through the lack of distinction between the "good" of the hero and the "evil" of the villains, the dichotomy on which the thriller conspiracy is projected is thrown into confusion and uncertainty. In these

narratives, the moral uncertainty is expressed and experienced by the characters within the text and not solely in the mind of the reader, for the characters themselves are ambivalent about the distinction between “good” and “evil.” Thus, the paranoia of the conspiracy does not carry the thriller element through the narrative, instead, between the lines, the reader sees problematic slippages in the differentiation of the morals between the opposing sides.

In summary, Hasluck’s novels appear to develop certain characteristics of the thriller, such as some conspiratorial element, a degree of paranoia and the presence of a lone, socially-constructed hero. However, the novels more closely fit Palmer’s definition of the negative thriller in that the conspiracies are small, the end is uncertain, the paranoia is compromised by moral uncertainty and the protagonist is an antihero who is weak in decisiveness and moral aptitude. Such departure from the traditional thriller mould does not make Hasluck’s work radical, for both the mystery-thriller and the negative thriller are conservative genres. The mystery-thriller invents heroes who rescue society by overcoming outside threats of conspirators, so returning society back to a state of equilibrium. While the negative thriller does not allow the antihero to win a convincing victory, and society is left vulnerable, less stable, and it is more likely to be transformed in some way different to its original status, the change is minimal. To Palmer, neither the mystery-thriller with the glamorous hero nor the negative thriller with the ambivalent antihero is more faithful to the thriller genre, but each is a genuine alternative interpretation of the same phenomena. Each thriller type allows a different kind of ideology to be reflected in the text. The crucial difference is the conventional mystery-thriller does not allow any real critique of society because it resolves all unsettled issues and returns society to an even keel again. Hasluck-the-writer’s choice, then, to use the negative thriller variation allows some disruption of society to remain, and some issues of importance to be left unresolved. In short, the negative thriller is both “conservative” and, in a minimal way, “radical.”

This incremental shift in society framed through the negative thriller, then, is the “radical” aspect of Hasluck’s texts. The novels reveal that one viewpoint cannot

contain all truth, and in the final analysis justice is often in the interest of the stronger party. The stronger party, then, maintains an order in society which reflects its own concerns. The reader's perception of society's foundations, such as the truth and the law, are undermined in small but significant ways. In this sense, then, an indirect paranoia is created in the reader's mind, a paranoia that grows as he/she realises that all which appears to be reasonable and stable in society is, in fact, fluctuating, illusionary and unstable.

## Chapter 3

**Satire: Classical and Postmodern**

*The man in the broken maze  
of crazy mirrors, sees  
himself as many selves -  
(from "Access," 54)*

While it can be profitable to read Hasluck's novels generically as thrillers or negative thrillers, another interpretation which Hasluck-the-critic often alludes to is a reading through the framework of satire. In a limited way, satire provides a more uniform reading of Hasluck's novels than does the thriller genre, especially through the device of classifying the antiheroes/narrators according to the characteristics of the archetypal protagonists of classical, satiric comedy (such as the railer and the clown). However, the narratives themselves, with the exception of *The Hand That Feeds You*, are not true satires, but, like most postmodern texts, they are all, often at multiple levels, strongly inscribed by the parodic.

Throughout Hasluck's work, then, satire can be seen residing in the deeper structures of the narratives, where the surface literary form of the mystery-thriller simply acts as a host for the literary and cultural critique developed through the satirising of the issues and philosophies pursued. Gabrielle Lord, in the *National Times*, contends, for example, that *The Bellarmine Jug* can be read either "as an academic thriller or as an examination of civilisation and culture" (30). The critical examination of "civilisation and culture" is a function of satire. Hasluck-the-critic suggests that he has intentionally chosen the mystery-thriller genre to develop a satire of the West because of the similarities between the two types of text. In the mystery-thriller the

detective acts like a reader of special competence, selecting only the significant signs and shaping them into a narrative. In this respect the mystery/thriller is not unlike satire – as the surface action proceeds the

satirical protagonist, like the detective, moves according to the whim of the bizarre (or mysterious) circumstances in which he has become involved while in the background we see emerging a picture, at times a poignant picture, of what there was before, of what has been lost; the milieu in which the victim moved in the case of the mystery/thriller; the society which once existed in the case of the satire, but which now is crumbling into absurdity and ruin. ("A Writer's Story," 52)

Just as the reader of the mystery-thriller looks through the eyes of the hero and sees that society and its institutions as corrupt and in need of restoration, so the reader of satire sees through the eyes of the protagonist, understanding the absurdity of present social structures and the need for their reformation.

After describing his work as both satire and mystery-thriller, Hasluck-the-critic hypothesises that both forms of writing

encourage speculation about the nature of the lives we lead, and about the structure of society. . . . The role of the writer is to understand and report as honestly as he or she can on what is happening in society. In doing so the writer becomes both a catalyst and a force for change because it would be an unusual society which did not respond when a need for change was clearly demonstrated. ("Imprudent Friends," 111-12)

When read as satire, then, some of Hasluck's work can become an *exposé* of Western civilisation, especially with regard to the institutions of the law, literature, history and democracy. Furthermore, the discourses surrounding order and disorder, memory and fiction, power and politics, both within the individual and within society, are parodied, analysed and experimented with throughout the novels, especially through serio-comic narrators and protagonists.

Satire, however, is not a commonly recognised device in Australian writing today. It is seen as an occasional tool used within the greater generic framework of a text. It is rare for a contemporary literary work to be classified as a traditional satire, even though it could be argued, using Todorov's term, that satire is present in society as a "common speech act," especially in jokes, folklore and cartoons. One



reason for the dearth of this classification in literature is the emphasis on authorial intent in classical satire, for traditional satire works best when the reader and the implied author share a common knowledge about the political, social and cultural issues satirised. In a postmodern age, any focus on an author, implied or otherwise, is considered inappropriate and suspect, so classical satire is seen as a part of a past age when the concept of a knowing and controlling author reigned supreme. Commenting on classical satire, John Clark and Anna Motto observe, that “definitions of satire are curiously brought to focus not at all on satire itself, but on the satirist and his intentions, and on the audience and the satire’s effects” (*Satire: That Blasted Art*, 4). The recognition of authorial intent (through the use of Hasluck-the-satirist, and not just Hasluck-the-writer) is prominent in this chapter’s discussion of *The Hand That Feeds You*, for the purpose of Hasluck-the-writer to represent himself at the satirist is implicit in the subtitle: *A Satiric Nightmare*.<sup>12</sup> For the reader or critic to ignore the “presence” of Hasluck, as the implied author in the satire, does not solve the problem of the intentionality behind the text, for even if the implied author is not mentioned directly he still remains implied in the mind of the knowing reader. Classical satire, then, more than most other texts, challenges the notion of the “death of the author” and sits uneasily in the postmodern context.

Furthermore, traditional satire is largely political in nature and message, and is mostly a product of times of social agitation and political oppression. The former eminence of classical satire, asserts Basil Willey, was dependent on the conditions of Britain in the eighteenth-century, which was a time of great upheaval politically, religiously and socially, and, therefore, a time “especially favourable to the satiric kind of measurement” (101). Within the interregnums of that time, he states,

[s]atire seems to occur somewhere between acceptance and revolution, and it is not surprising, if this is so, that the early eighteenth century should have been its most high and palmy time. (106)

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<sup>12</sup> In “Untitled Prose Piece VII,” Hasluck-the-critic writes: “My sub-title, *A Satiric Nightmare*, was a reminder, then, that the book was not to be read literally. It had become apparent to me that without a label the package would never arrive. The plot was implausible, the publishers complained. The characters lacked warmth. The love affair (in fact, a ribald and grossly exaggerated sex scene) was not tender enough.” (12).

The fact that such extreme conditions do not exist in Australia today may be another reason why serious classical satires are a rarity in contemporary Australian writing. Moreover, as a prominent classical genre, satire is governed by a moralistic view of the world, which overtly condemns and directly privileges certain political and ethical positions. A novel with such a moralistic, singular viewpoint is likewise doomed to be unacceptable to the postmodern era.

Classical satire, then, in the time-honoured tradition of Swift and Pope, is characterised by wit, sarcasm, cynicism, sardonic invective, lampooning, parody, ridicule, travesty, irony and grotesquery, and includes the devices of reversal, paradox and anticlimax. The satirist uses the whole work to persuade the reader, through ardent though hollow laughter, of the corruptness of the satire's object, whether an individual or society. Critics such as M.H. Abrams classify the genre of satire into, firstly, formal or direct satires which are in the first-person, the "I" speaking to the reader or "adversarius" within the text, and, secondly, indirect satires in the third-person, which use the narrative form of literature to satirise the "characters who make themselves and their opinions ridiculous by what they think, say and do" (155).

An example of direct satire is Jonathan Swift's "A Modest Proposal for Preventing the Children of Ireland from Being a Burden to Their Parents or Country," in which the first-person narrator powerfully communicates to the reader the ghastly suggestion of establishing a human infant-meat trade to reduce the large numbers of poverty-stricken children in Ireland. Indirect satire is found in Swift's tale of *Gulliver's Travels*, for Swift uses the narrative of the sea voyage and shipwreck to lampoon politicians, scientists and the "civilised" notions of eighteenth-century England. However, all archetypal satiric texts, whether direct or indirect, are monologic, the characters uni-dimensional, the composition centring around ideology and ideas rather than the more subtle approach to character development which has found expression in the realist novel. Such classic satire is, as M.D. Fletcher describes it, "aggressively referential" (*Contemporary Political Satire*, 24), as it attacks the privileged position of certain cultural and social structures and

practices within society by the use of reversal, the satiric text proposing an equally essentialist, though certainly ludicrous, opposing position.

Classical satire's strong emphasis on reader recognition and assumption of authorial design are swiftly rejected by many current, postmodern views. Dubrow, however, creates a space for satire in literature today by describing contemporary satire as a reactionary counter-genre to the pastoral in that it exposes and parodies the idyllic visions of the sylvan. Using Dubrow's sense of the counter-pastoral, then, it could be reasoned that satire is quite pervasive in contemporary literature. However, as M.D. Fletcher, in *Contemporary Political Satire*, notes, satire in current, postmodern texts is quite different from traditional satire:

Clearly . . . the assumptions informing postmodern literature conflict with those that underlie [traditional] satire, specifically [traditional] satire's proximity to historical reality and its reliance on establishing shared comprehension between satirist and audience. . . .

What is different about contemporary response to the political is not a sense of crisis or of extreme deviation from some presumed norm, but rather the conviction that there is no acceptable means of demonstrating the absolute validity of any norm, the conviction that the emperor has never had clothes, and that even the great political theories have always simply emphasised some values at the expense of others. (x-xi)

In a postmodern age beguiled with the concept of the "death of the author" and the impossibility of establishing universal norms, traditional satire seems oddly, even quaintly, out of place, with its candid emphasis on the author and the reader as members of a community with agreed expectations of life and text. However, a number of literary devices, such as parody and irony, are important components in both classical satires and postmodern texts, so some shared basis for a common reading can be found.

Hasluck's third novel, *The Hand That Feeds You*, is in the tradition of Swift and Pope, being an attempt to lampoon contemporary Australian social and political life. As such, the body of the text reads as a classical satire in which the

intentionality of the author, and the shared knowledge of the reader about the events and conditions of Australia in the 1970s, are important to the text's interpretation. However, the novel also has a number of striking postmodern twists. When reading this novel, then, it is helpful to keep in mind both the difference in the literary connection between classical satire and contemporary or postmodern satire, as well as the banality of Australian political life. Due to the rarity of traditional satires in Australian literature, the novel will be discussed at some length.

### **Hasluck's "Classical" Satire**

Although satire is present in most of Hasluck's work, *The Hand That Feeds You* is the most explicit satiric text. It is a traditional, indirect satire which uses the genre of the return of an expatriate son to critique Australian's social and political life. The satire's potency cannot primarily be ascribed to the views of the protagonist or the narrator, but is attributable to a strong element of authorial intent, conveyed through the tone of the narrative as a whole. Dee, the protagonist, offers little comment on the conditions in Australia, being rather compliant and finally using them to his own advantage. He basically accepts the Australia of the future, and appears to be only temporarily taken back by the many dramatic, often ridiculous changes that have occurred in Australia society while he has been overseas. He shows, for example, only momentary amazement that the Australian population has become absurdly over-reliant on subsidies and handouts from the government, and he offers little more than a token challenge to the tightly controlled discipline of Australian society maintained through the population's dependence on government resources.

Although the novel is about the Australia of the future, it is, in fact, an attempt to construct a Swiftian, classical satire on the social and political Australia of the late nineteen seventies and early eighties. Hasluck-the-satirist uses images of an Australia of the future to lampoon and ridicule the practices of Australia's political and social life in the era of Malcolm Fraser's Prime Ministership (with a good dose

of critical reflection on the times of Gough Whitlam). The political backdrop to the novel is Australia's two-party system of government, the liberal democratic ideals of individual freedom and free enterprise being associated with the Liberal Party, while the social welfare system and government intervention are identified with the Labor Party.

In *The Hand That Feeds You*, the Middle Central Party parodies the Liberal Party, while the Central Middle Party parodies the Labor Party. Ironically, the difference between the two parties is purely cosmetic, as they are identical except for the slight variance in their names. Dee finds out from his uncle Roger that elections

aren't fought on issues any longer. Haven't been for years. Everyone is agreed about what ought to happen. The only difference is that the Middle Central Party has to go through the motions of being in favour of private enterprise while the Central Middle Party has to go through the motions of being in favour of state control. But the result is the same. The money comes from the Government. That's all you need to know. (56)

While the political set-up in *The Hand That Feeds You* seems ridiculous, it is a common complaint amongst Australian voters that their choices at election times are limited, because there is little significant difference between the major parliamentary parties.<sup>13</sup>

Furthermore, *The Hand That Feeds You* satirises the trend of both major political parties to sell off public assets by constructing the ultimate privatisation, for the electoral system is tendered out to be run by Electoral Enterprises, a company answerable to shareholders rather than to the electorate. The many informal votes cast in the compulsory election can be distributed at the discretion of the Electoral Commissioner, so his choice inevitably decides the winning candidate. Ironically, he usually chooses a candidate who has attracted his displeasure – someone he wishes to vent his spleen on, for following the Australian attribute of chopping

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<sup>13</sup> Humphrey McQueen has argued, in *A New Britannia*, that the significant federal parliamentary parties, since Federation in Australia, have all been very pro-British, and have had little to separate them in terms of policies which contribute to Australia's independence and strength as a nation.

down the tall-poppies, “no one likes a winner” (101). Any attempt by Dee to take the political forum seriously is met with ridicule and violent protest, both by the public and the press. The point of the satire is further driven home by the travesty of Dee’s vacillation and his final decision, made in the full knowledge of what is happening in Australia, to capitulate to the big-brother system. Thus, as a classical satire, the novel seeks, through ribald descriptions and caricature, to parody the political strategies and ideologies which drive various factions and parties in contemporary Australian politics.

Furthermore, in the tradition of George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, language and political-speak in Australian public life are parodied as common-place. Acronyms abound. For example, the Public Relations Officer of Electoral Enterprise has the acronym of P.R.O., which also doubles for his other role as a Propaganda Retrieval Organiser. His immediate boss is the Public Relations Internal Control Keeper, or P.R.I.C.K. When it comes to political-speak, the novel contains a glossary of terms used in the Public Service, including such terms as “flateauing,” which is “the process of reducing a bright idea to bumf,” while “bumf” is “sheets of paper bearing platitudes couched in impenetrable prose” (176-77).

Jargon and political-speak are not unique to Australia, but the novel also parodies concerns which are more typically Australian. For example, egalitarianism, a supposedly national trait of which Australians are particularly proud, is strongly satirised in *The Hand That Feeds You*. The egalitarian aspects of the brave new society of the novel are championed by the Australian Trade Union (commonly referred to as ATU or At You) which is headed by the charismatic leadership of Mersey. The belligerent Mersey is likely to be modelled on Bob Hawke, famed President of the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) in the 1970s. In the satire ATU is responsible for the enforcement of equality for all. In its fight for the workers, Mersey’s catch cry is “an agreement is only the beginning of negotiations” (29). This militant position appears to be popular with the workers, even if it is entirely impractical, and it results in such practices as the ground crews

at airports being allowed to act as pilots for the incoming aircraft in order to qualify for higher pay. In a scene reminiscent of the infamous air-controllers' strike in 1989, a frustrated Dee must wait an extra three hours before he disembarks at Sydney airport so that each worker can have an opportunity to drive the "International Skybus" around the tarmac. Similarly, the cleaners, outside the election hall Dee is trying to find, refuse to help Dee because their "award doesn't cover answering questions" (86).

Moreover, in the name of equity, traffic attendants and postal workers are called traffic and postal ministers so as not to be considered less significant than Cabinet Ministers. (In this case one cannot be sure if the object of the lampooning is the postal workers or the government ministers.) Suppliers of merchandise and services are considered to be consumers also, and, therefore, have an equal right to appeal to the Consumer Protection Board. Even Roger's Adviser threatens to appeal to them if his own advice to Dee turns out to be disastrous (142). Caught in the gap between these competing demands for equality, Dee, at times, seems to be a naive protagonist, albeit with a quixotic touch, used by others to advance their own causes, as he searches for Meynard, the apparently true hero of the Australian Republic.

Furthermore, the satire goes to farcical proportions as equality must be applied to animals as well. In an ironic reversal, the animals from the Taronga Park Zoo are portrayed as a privileged group living at a prime riverfront address, and, in the name of equality they are shifted to a shanty town which has sprung up on the Sydney's Domain. A young man, who sees it as only fair that he can steal a couple of Streeton's paintings from the art gallery to smash up their frames for firewood, exclaims:

Why should animals get the best views of Sydney harbour? It's unjust.

Elitist. It belongs to the people. Not just a few silvertails who've been born with everything laid on. (155)

The absurdities continue, for a slogan painted on the sails of the Opera House reads "Land rights for gay whales" (165). This slogan parodies many of the justice and

equality issues of the 1970s in Australia, demonstrating again the satire's dependence on a shared knowledge between reader and Hasluck-the-writer. Australia's last whaling station at Albany, Western Australia, was closed in 1978, largely due to demonstrations by conservationists and the call for a national inquiry into whaling. Gay rights marches, anti-discrimination bills and aboriginal land rights were all features of Australian life in the wake of the Whitlam administration in the 1970s. The narrative mixes and pushes these claims for equality to ridiculous extremes.

Similarly, there is equal opportunity for the flashers at the nudist beach, for the Equal Opportunities Board has ruled that they should be allowed to come out of the sandhills and use helicopters. While nude bathing may not seem newsworthy today, it was first officially legalised at two of Sydney's beaches in 1976. At the nudist beach Dee visits it has become compulsory to remove all clothing. In a somewhat Orwellian vein, three basic precepts are articulated in the satire by the Social Opportunities Board: "Everything must be equal. The public interest is equal to the total of all self-interests. Any self-interest is equal to the public interest" (46). Again, as a somewhat naive protagonist, Dee does not react to this inane overemphasis on equality, except when he is annoyed by the way others' actions impact on himself. Instead, it is the tone and specific referentiality of the narrative, and the absurdity of the events and circumstances, which give the satire its biting, critical edge.

In another parody of an Australian institution, the social welfare system, the range of subsidies and allowances in *The Hand That Feeds You* is as ridiculous as it is enormous. In the early 1970s the Whitlam Government brought in a range of new, and sometimes controversial welfare categories and payments. Many of these were continued on in the Fraser and Hawke years, and it is only in recent times that the Howard Government has contemplated cut-backs in certain areas, such as student allowances and unemployment. *The Hand That Feeds You* parodies the range and complexity of Australia's welfare system, especially critiquing the possibility of



using the system as a sole means of support and income. Ingenuity, and using the system have become a way of life in the Australia of the future.

Dee's uncle Roger, for example, has a scheme where he gives cheap rent to a dentist in order to have a tooth he has lost kept in good order so he can claim a discomfort allowance from the Dental Distress Fund. Meanwhile he is trying to lose the tooth in the postal system so he can convert the discomfort allowance into the tooth's reinstatement value. However, through incompetence the tooth keeps being returned to him. The taxi driver who returns the parcel with the tooth has the postal franchise for the Rail Road Area in order to supplement his passenger subsidy from the Taxi Board. The postal ministers cannot deliver mail because of their union award and are fully occupied attending stop work meetings. The taxi driver simply throws the mail in the bin (he can do that because he is protected by the award), and it makes no difference as most of the mail is written to fulfil quotas. The message on a postcard Dee reads states,

Dear Reader . . . Please do not bother to read this. The writer is a public servant who has to keep his quota of outgoing mail up. Yours sincerely,  
The writer. (34)

Unionism, and strikes over demarcations of work practices, were particularly prevalent in the Fraser years. The bureaucratic red-tape, which so often ties up the government departments and instrumentalities, is an ever-present phenomenon, but in the Australia of the future it has become an absurdity.

But the travesty gets worse. Part of the reason the tooth parcel returns to Roger is because he has an inept girl working for him, so he can claim the Incompetent Staff Subsidy. The general attitude towards government handouts is summed up by the taxi driver:

I don't make the bloody rules. . . . As long as I'm running my own show, I'm happy. I'm not going back working for wages, that's for sure. That's what the Commission's done for us. Gave everyone a chance to run their own show. If a person doesn't take that chance he's mad. Working for wages! What kind of life is that? Every time y' learn a new job At You

gets a discrimination award. That's okay. That's what they have to do. They're the union. That's their job. But where does it leave you? Back at square one. Getting paid for sitting round on your fanny. How's a man going to build up his deductions when he's doing nothing? No, sir. Not for me. As long as I'm getting the Government subsidy, I'm my own boss. Running my own show, that's what I like. (30)

Formerly Roger had received an Estate Agent's Bounty and had served as a professional witness on numerous inquiries, including the poverty committee, the social security committee, the medical committee, and the Commission of Inquiry into Malnutrition – during which “he was obliged to excuse himself from the witness-box owing to a sudden bout of indigestion brought on by an excessive helping of pork sausages for breakfast” (51). Unfortunately, although Roger employs an Adviser to get the best out of the system, his Adviser has not kept abreast with the latest changes and has given him bad advice. For someone like Roger, the effort to obtain the subsidies becomes almost too much. He considers that he is getting too old, for he finds the forms, the jargon (bumf) and the regulations for ripping off the system are getting beyond him, and he comments that one needs ten years of study and a doctorate to make it pay.

Although Dee does not appear to be entirely critical of the changes in Australia, he certainly feels uncomfortable with them, and wishes to return to his overseas home where he can continue his writing. Roger offers Dee the aid of his Adviser to help get him the maximum benefits from the government, and, in order to raise the necessary finance to leave Australia, Dee is willing to comply with the wishes of the Adviser, regardless of the ethical implications. Thus Dee offers little in the way of denunciation or praise. Instead it is the satiric text itself which most powerfully exposes the absurdity of the system to the reader.

Ironically, Roger's Adviser finds himself at a loss. He suggests, or rather commands, Dee to rape his late father's housekeeper to claim Paternity benefits. Dee hardly raises an objection to this means of financing his trip, and he plans to put the suggestion into action. However, Dee himself is almost raped by the

housekeeper, who is already pregnant to her late husband via artificial insemination. The housekeeper claims her late husband was a mushroom-grower, and that he is more productive dead than alive, for she, being pregnant, can simultaneously claim the “mushroom grower’s maternity assistance benefit and the mycophiliac<sup>14</sup> widow’s tax avoidance plan” (148). Through the prioritising of the desire for government handouts over issues of moral concern and social justice, the satire proposes a grotesque, mean, self-gratifying streak in the Australian psyche.

Dee’s own moral corruptness is evident in that the Adviser gave him the choice of writing heavily-edited prose pieces, or raping the housekeeper to gain the Paternity benefits. Dee initially chooses the latter because he cannot face having his writing sanitised. His motivation is to avoid having his passport stamped S.C.A.B., the acronym for “Suspected of Criticising Approved Beliefs” (136): the prospect of having such a label makes Dee shiver. The lengths to which he goes to gain a subsidy show that he, like the rest of the Australian population, is primarily concerned with his own needs and how he can fulfil them. Dee’s complicity makes him uncritical of the trends in Australian political and social culture, and the casualness with which he seeks to rape the housekeeper, and then to compromise his own writing, satirise the popular perception many Asian countries seem to have of Australians, that they would sell their conscience and future in order to live off government handouts. Issues of self-interest in Australian politics, and its accompanying moral and social blindness, are the major concerns of the satire.

Perhaps the one glimmer of moral strength, which shows that Dee does not behave entirely passively to all the information about the brave new Australia, is his tenacity to track down the legendary political figure, Henry Meynard. The search for Meynard, who ostensibly offers hope of resistance, is Dee’s way of instigating a search for the truth. However, he finds the old champion of the Australian Republic being kept by a family so they can claim the invalid allowance and tax deductions.

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<sup>14</sup> From mycophile, a lover of mushrooms.

In the decade before *The Hand That Feeds You* was written, two “political champions,” one from each of the two major political parties, died in Australia. Jack Lang, a legendary Labor Premier from NSW, and a pioneer in social welfare legislation, died in 1975, while Sir Robert Menzies, a long-serving Liberal Prime Minister of Australia and staunch monarchist, passed away in 1978. Meynard, in *The Hand That Feeds You*, is more likely to be modelled on Lang than Menzies because of his Republican sympathies and his links to Sydney. However, the satire reveals how all Australian Premiers and Prime Ministers, regardless of their political affiliations, are quickly forgotten once they disappear from the limelight. On finding the decrepit Meynard, Dee gives up. His candid reaction to Meynard’s frailty and impotence is not one of horror and hardening of political resolve, but rather of confusion followed by resignation and complicity with the big-brother system. Dee’s reaction highlights both the disappointment Australians have in the flawed nature of their national heroes (Menzies, for example, was too enamoured of the British monarchy, while Lang was too reactionary against the federal government), as well as the apathy Australians have about building towards a better political future.

The apathy about political improvement is shown to be caused by a highly developed sense of selfishness in the Australian population. Due to the self-interestedness, no apparent protest, or concern, is shown over the selling off of Australia’s national assets to finance the massive program of allowances.<sup>15</sup> Instead the Adviser quotes the maxim, “In striking a blow for myself, I’m striking a blow for a better world” (134). Furthermore, self-interest is seen to be equal to the public interest, and the ideology expounded by the Adviser asserts that self and government interests have to be blended together to form a composite, which is called “the public interest” (136). The question is not what you can do for your country, but what your country can do for you. This perspective, which satirises current Australian attitudes, is endemic in the Australia of the future, and

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<sup>15</sup> Dee discovers that the Sydney Harbour Bridge is being dismantled and sold to the Japanese; Ayers Rock and the Barrier Reef have already gone; Tasmania has been “flogged” to Brazil a week earlier; and the Opera House is in the process of being auctioned.

everyone, including politicians, are out to get what they can. The candidates in *The Hand That Feeds You*, for example, are involved in the political campaign because an industrial award allows double time for those leaving work to help in an election.

Dee wins the election, and immediately runs into problems with money, the ultimate symbol of self-interest and success in contemporary Australia. Initially, Dee is puzzled when money is showered on him after his election win, and then is horrified when it is used to undermine his integrity, his photo being taken with the podium and his hands full of cash. Later, he is thrown out of a restaurant, and he finds that his success and abundance of cash appears pretentious in post-materialist Australia. Roger explains the transformation in Australian's attitude to money:

Money is tainted, a threat to the human spirit. It prevents you getting a swimming pool, a second car, a beach cottage and a pleasure boat. Money! I'm glad we're rid of it. Materialism was just a phase. We've seen the light. (122)

Ironically, all the suitcases of money given to Dee after his election are valueless to him. The worthlessness of money in the Australia of the future lampoons the moral bankruptcy of Australia's current dependence on policies driven almost solely by economic rationalism.

In contrast to the poor standing of politicians in *The Hand That Feeds You*, the education system is seen as the key to improving the quality of all Australian's lives, including political candidates. In the futuristic nightmare, for the sake of equal opportunity, everyone under twenty-five has a right to go to university. Even criminals are sent to universities by the Judges (who are called Justice Brokers as the word Judge is considered elitist). In fact many of the members of a street gang called "Crap" who have been sent to university, have been so successful that, now, Roger remarks, "Half the staff were Crap" (49). Roger's remark suggests Hasluck-the-satirist's despair at Australia's general apathy towards the present lowering of academic excellence in higher education through the democratisation of tertiary

education. Equality is seen to compromise the academic integrity of the education system.

Ironically, however, education cannot bring equality, but instead provides an extremely divisive framework, for as children advance through the system their different intellectual capacities inevitably become apparent. The egalitarian principles do not apply to the higher education system because the scholastic accreditation procedure is based on the “antediluvian methods” of intellectual difference and academic assessment (52). In the egalitarian society of *The Hand That Feeds You*, then, the academics are the only ones to be exempted from the push for equality. The exemption means that academia has the potential, at least theoretically, to be exempt from the levelling influence of the society, and subsequently original thinking is frowned on as threatening the fabric of the nation. Instead, plagiarism in the production of academic theses is encouraged, and it has become a condition attached to government subsidies. As a result of the government’s policy on the distribution of its coveted subsidies to academics, the Australia of the future is a nation which has “a long history of imitation” (14).

It may be of interest to the reader that Hasluck himself held a part-time position on the Australia Council, a government body responsible for the distribution of money to the arts. In a reflection on his time with the Australia Council, Hasluck-the-critic notes that in the art world it is “the virtuous and well-behaved” whom the general public wish to receive the grants, but they “frequently fail to leave a mark.” Such artists are less creative and their work borrows heavily from others. Instead, Hasluck asserts:

The successful artist is unlikely to be a conformist. He or she may be moody, iconoclastic, even ungrateful. How can one explain all this to legislators and their auditors who wish to warm hearts in the electorate with talk of ‘accountability’ and comforting statistics. Some of the factors which produce great art are difficult to compute. (“Inside the Australia Council,” 166-67)

While “great art” itself is a problematic concept, such comments on the state of politics and art in Australia reflect Hasluck-the-satirist’s thoughts about the danger of prioritising social niceties which appeal to the public’s fickle fancies as criteria for the granting of financial funding to the arts. Such criteria ignores the more productive environment in which the arts can thrive, which flourishes in the atmosphere of the necessary liberty of pursuing “original,” inventive thought free from political interference. The policy of rewarding the virtuous and well-behaved leads, as in *The Hand That Feeds You*, to the inevitable, subtle praise of plagiarism.

The same dilemma holds true for the production of literary works, for, Roger explains to Dee, two types of fiction exist in the brave new Australia: original fiction and factual fiction.

Original fiction is what you make up yourself while factual fiction is using what someone else made up; a book that’s already been published. Factual fiction. The name speaks for itself. It’s in existence so it’s a fact. (55)

Aside from its obvious threat to society, explains Roger, the danger with original fiction is that a successful writer who gets favourable reviews would soon look like he or she doesn’t need a subsidy, and a poor writer who received too many negative reviews would look like he or she didn’t deserve assistance. Factual fiction, or plagiarism, is a less rewarding but safer way to earn a subsidy. The definitions and conditions for literary production in *The Hand That Feeds You* parody the present postmodern use of intertexts and collage which openly and brazenly promotes itself as a form of plagiarism. The controversy surrounding Helen Demidenko’s *The Hand That Signed the Paper*, the winning entry in the 1995 Miles Franklin Literary Award (as well as the 1993 Vogel Literary Award and the 1995 Australian Literature Society Gold Medal), graphically illustrates the issues raised in *The Hand That Feeds You*, even though they post-date the satire’s publication. Ironically, the titles of these novels are uncannily similar, the hand in each case being a controlling hand, and one not adverse to plagiarism, lies and deception. The contentiousness of Demidenko’s awards has led to much debate, including the resignation of members from the Association for the Study of

Australian Literature (ASAL) (see Debra Adelaide's letter in *Notes and Furphies* 35, 1-2).

The need for a healthy debate is also raised in *The Hand That Feeds You*, for while Dee allows his writings to be sanitised in order to gain a subsidy, he initially believes in the need for philosophers and writers so that responsible discussion can continue. Part of his early resistance to the controlling influences in Australian society includes the writing of a short story entitled "Bury My Heart in the Bosun's Chair," a parody on the society he finds himself in, being, in essence, a satire within a satire. Just as "Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee" reflects the final "battle" and fateful massacre of the plains Indians of North America, so Dee's parody shows the trapped hopelessness of the individual in the Australian welfare system. "Bury My Heart in the Bosun's Chair," is a Kafka-like story in that it describes an impossible situation where the demand for equality means that no applicant is able to succeed in getting a job, for the applicants are involved in an endless play of making claims for equality, and while the claims are being processed no decisions can be made. In a similar way, the resistance of Dee also comes to nothing, for at the end of the narrative he is defeated by the endless play in the discipline of the brave new society, submissively deciding to go ahead with his writing as a means of obtaining a subsidy. The discipline of the system is triumphant. So an apparent closure is momentarily achieved.

But the closure does not remain. An "Editor's Note" provides a postmodern twist, questioning the authenticity of the text, the motivation which brought it into being, the accuracy of its material and the validity of its authorship. Thus a postmodern window of uncertainty leaves the satire, and its moralistic, political message, open to be undermined and discredited. Until this moment of postmodern reversal the novel has largely conformed to the expectations of the classical genre of indirect satire.



## Hasluck's "Menippean" Satire

Despite the reversal at the end of *The Hand That Feeds You*, its monologic, uni-directional characteristics, typical of a traditional satire, marginalise it in the postmodern literary world. A satiric genre more appropriate for the contemporary, postmodern condition may be Menippean satire, a form of the serio-comical genre, which Mikhail Bakhtin regards as "carnivalised literature." He sets out his assertions in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*:

What are the distinguishing characteristics of the genres of the serio-comical?

For all their motley external diversity, they are united by their deep bond with *carnivalistic folklore*. They are all – to a greater or lesser degree – saturated with a *carnival sense of the world*. . . . In all genres of the serio-comical, to be sure, there is a strong rhetorical element, but in the atmosphere of *joyful relativity* characteristic of a carnival sense of the world this element is fundamentally changed: there is a weakening of its one-sided rhetorical seriousness, its rationality, its singular meaning, its dogmatism. (107)

Menippean satire is, Bakhtin argues, the precursor of the modern novel, because it is both dialogic and polyphonic. For him, Menippean satire does not come to a closure like the epic and the tragedy, nor does it imply a paradoxical closure as in the case of classical satire, for the play within the Menippean satire's text allows for a dialogue, or a rhetoric, which maintains a continual banter within the narrative. Unlike officially sanctioned views expressed in monologic texts which Bakhtin calls "genres of praise," Menippean satires invert the serious and poke fun at the world in genres of dispraise.<sup>16</sup>

Drawing on the work of Bakhtin, Frank Palmeri contends that postmodern narrative satire is a form of carnivalised literature. Palmeri explains, in *Satire in Narrative*, that Bakhtin simply saw the dialogical novel as supplanting the

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<sup>16</sup> Bakhtin sets out his discussion on parody in "From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse." In the prose novel, an unending dialogue ("dispute") is intentionally maintained between official languages (the "dismal sacred word") and folk languages (the "cheerful folk word") (76).

nineteenth-century monologic epic. But, Palmeri argues, it was more than that, for the polyphonic narrative satire is not just a forerunner of the modern novel but is a major feature of the contemporary postmodern text. He reasons that Bakhtin's analysis of the novel only took him as far as Dostoevsky in the nineteenth-century, because politically, in the Soviet Union after the 1920s, it would have been too dangerous for him to "try to incorporate parodic modernist narratives into a twentieth-century history of the theory of the novel" (136). Palmeri describes how in

Bakhtin's account, narrative or Menippean satire persists as the major literary vehicle of carnivalesque parodic energies in literature until the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when a progressive impoverishment of carnival caused Menippean satire to fade away; Menippean satire served the teleological purpose of preparing the way for the novel, which in the eighteenth century realised its full potential and, in the polyphonic novel of Dostoevsky, its highest development. Bakhtin does not sketch or even acknowledge a history of the novel after Dostoevsky. However, the realistic social and psychological novel begins to give way between the wars to parodic satiric narrative as a form particularly well suited to expressing modern and contemporary cultural forms and contradictions. (16)

Because of this, Palmeri maintains Bakhtin's influential thoughts on both parody and the satiric novel need to be "qualified and extended" (2).

Bakhtin's theories of the novel are built on the duality of the ordered, repressive official culture of the sanctioned powers versus the ambiguous, lively folk culture of the common people. The folk culture is typified in the carnival where the official culture is parodied through reversal, inversion, ridicule and irony. This interrogative process is dialogical and open-ended, for no resolution takes place and the two forms remain equally valued and intact. What Palmeri argues is that while Bakhtin's view of culture is more heterogeneous and open, it is still restrictive and confining because of its reliance on the strong dichotomy. Palmeri expands Bakhtin's theory, asserting that post-Dostoevsky

the most complex and subversive narrative satires incorporate more than a single instance of parodic energy: after parodying a prevailing perspective, these satires go on to parody their own parodic inversion, without reverting to the original point of departure. Parodic satire then becomes not an isolated episode, but a continuing process of unsettling hierarchies of value and systems of thought. Through repeated parody and self-parody, such satire counterpoises multiple frames of understanding without assenting to the authority of any single perspective. It aims at reaching a 'perspective of perspectives.' (2-3)

Thus narrative satire is characterised by internal reversals as well as the normally expected external reversals. Within the text, Palmeri states, "the satirist is satirised" (3). These internal reversals, where the parodic is parodied, are reversals which go unrecognised by the protagonist, and, therefore, the text remains open-ended. For example, Dee, in *The Hand That Feeds You*, in spite of his satiric essay, is basically left none the wiser after his exposure to the inconsistencies of Australia's future culture and society. As illustrated in this case, then, Palmeri's concept of narrative satire is similar to indirect satire mentioned earlier in the discussion on classical satire. Consequently, it can be seen that postmodern satire is not a new style, but is perhaps better defined by the use to which the text is put.

Accordingly, narrative satire provides at least two perspectives, and this, coupled with satire's ability to incorporate more than one genre within the narrative, creates a dialogue which Palmeri terms "a dialogue among forms" (5). By going beyond Bakhtin's view of Menippean satire, Palmeri seeks to enunciate a broader concept which he defines in terms of a modern, parodic narrative satire.

Carnival supposes only two worlds: one official, everyday, monological, and the opposite, unofficial, inverted, and ambivalent. However, parodic narrative satire is capable of challenging both an established authority and a less centralised, more dispersed configuration of authority. (8)

While Palmeri sees a fully dialogical narrative satire as undermining every perspective presented in the novel, he admits that a great variety of narrative satire exists at different levels of type, function and form, including many which are

didactic and dogmatic because they stop short of their full dialogic potential and proclaim a fixed position.

Furthermore, Palmeri asserts that the satirist's work can be either backward-looking, dreaming of a past golden age, or forward-looking, hoping for a utopian future. Satiric poetry, Palmeri claims, is mostly backward-looking, and, therefore, conservative, while satiric narrative is more often forward-looking, and, therefore, dissident.

Many critics have asserted the fundamentally conservative nature of satire and the satirist. . . . However, narrative satire parodies both the official voice of established beliefs and the discourse of its opponents. In doing so, it interrogates any claims to a systematic understanding of the world.

Narrative satire is therefore less tied to a conservative cultural project and potentially more subversive. (6)

Narrative satire, then, describes Hasluck's novels at their best, for most of the Hasluck's novels can be classified as satires in Palmeri's sense of postmodern narrative, or Menippean, satire. Indeed, even, the more traditional indirect satire, *The Hand That Feeds You*, exhibits features characteristic of Menippean satire.

By way of illustration, the parodies within Hasluck's texts often form a cacophony of voices, so intense that re-reading, or at least considered reflection, is mandatory. The novels parody themselves and their genres, setting themselves up as complex and serious literary works, only to turn and mock their own construction. This self-parody is seen through a number of devices, some of which have been mentioned earlier, such as the treatise at the end of *The Hand That Feeds You* on the validity of the novel, and its possibility of being authored by a group of writers; the revelation that *The Bellarmine Jug* is a fiction, written to honour the ideas of a retiring lecturer; and the narrative shift from first-person to second-person in *Truant State* in order to abuse the reader and position him or her as the victim of the murderer. Furthermore, a useful way of reading all of Hasluck's novels is through the consistent self-parody which is achieved through the serio-comic constructions of either the narrator or the protagonists.

According to M.D. Fletcher, in *Contemporary Political Satire: Narrative Strategies in the Postmodern Text*, there are three types of central protagonist within the Menippean, carnivalised literature of satiric narrative. These are the railer, the fool and the clown (which in turn is divided into four categories). While the postmodern narrative often problematises the consistency and wholeness of any character within a novel, Fletcher's stereotypes can still be helpful in categorising Hasluck's work, for the constancy of Hasluck's protagonist is never challenged to the point where the character is obliterated.

Fletcher's first category is the railer who is the village or court jester, an aggressor and scapegoat who stands in for the king in the carnival. The railer is "a lightning rod for ill-luck," and embodies the dichotomies of the sacred/profane and the lofty/lowly (8). Jack Traverne, in *Truant State*, is something of a railer, although he also fits another category to be mentioned later. Jack loses out in love, remaining a bachelor. He drops out of Teachers Training College after organising a concert prank which literally blows up in his face, nearly demolishing a theatre stage. He fails to help his father who, through blind idealism, is bankrupted, and he is a passive bystander as Jacob Vas is victimised and driven out of town. As a journalist on the goldfields Jack is involved with the lower, profane side of life, so that even the style of his narration changes into a rougher journalese characterised by sudden outbursts of profanity which colour his descriptions and banter with the reader.

Fletcher's second type of parodic protagonist is the fool, who interprets the carnival as a levelling force of both good and bad, creating an undifferentiated wholeness through the themes of death and resurrection which become rites of passage. The fool explores the relationship of humour, sex and violence. All three elements are present in Dyson Garrick, the protagonist in *The Blue Guitar*, and in Jacqueline Villiers, both a protagonist and a narrator in *The Country Without Music*. Dyson Garrick, a businessman who also fits another of Fletcher's parodic types, is always the comedian, making light of life's difficulties as he gradually

sinks into bankruptcy and corruption. He is characterised as a likeable, happy-go-lucky fellow, who has a brazen dare-devil streak that helps him dream and tackle ventures that would leave most people gasping. His strength and his weakness is that he can talk and humour his way through any situation. He is two-timing his wife, pursuing a steamy, physically passionate relationship with a nurse. He vacillates in the relationship, wanting to finish it yet driven by his own insecurities to prolong it. In the erratic zone between generosity and greed, faithfulness and infidelity, integrity and half-truths, Dyson spirals violently in and out of control. Bursts of drunkenness, theft, lies, self-loathing, reckless driving and violence punctuate the narrative with black comedy. Dyson's life is dying on many fronts, and he chooses to resurrect himself by turning to corruption, selling out his trusting partner, instead of facing the pain of death with integrity and only a long-term hope of revitalisation.

Jacqueline Villiers, one of the many narrators in *The Country Without Music*, is also characterised by a juxtaposition of humour, sex and violence. As a Creole and an Ilois, Jacqueline mocks the paternalistic, neo-colonial Australian businessmen who visit her island to investigate a business venture – along with a little sightseeing of course. Jacqueline's black humour is also directed at the establishment, the government of the island, which is led by her uncle and protector, Charles Villiers. Although Jacqueline does not know it, her uncle, a veteran of the French Indo-China wars, had a fleeting relationship with her mother at the height of a Carnival on the island of Dupuis, and is, possibly, her father. In her search for herself, Jacqueline is sexually used, at a fairground on the island, by a leader of the Ilois independence movement. Then, like her mother before her, she is promptly dropped by the man who has used her. Later, when the Australian businessmen arrive, Jacqueline takes a friendly interest in their leader, Don Ryan. However, Don, the family man, violently rapes her, for he chauvinistically thinks that he knows what she as a female and a Creole wants. Violence continually lies just below the surface of the novel, and it finally erupts at the Carnival on Dupuis in a dramatic demonstration in which Jacqueline spreads the blood of a slaughtered pig over her uncle. The government falls. Death, however, of government and

people in *The Country Without Music* does not lead to the resurrection of a better system, but instead generates a new set of circumstances in which the people are remarkably similar to those they have replaced.

Fletcher's third protagonist of the carnivalised literature is the clown whose characteristics revolve around the dichotomies of agility/awkwardness, intruder/expelled and victim/hero. Different versions of the clown tradition include the quixotic, the naif, the picaresque and the harlequin, and each of them can be found in Hasluck's work. According to Fletcher, the quixotic incorporates the

ambiguity of pursuing ends we all value yet having the pursuit appear ridiculous. In this tradition, the pursuit of justice is seen as ridiculous not because justice does not exist or even because reality per se is unjust, but rather because justice is elusive and tends to fall in the interstices. The quest for justice is depicted as a marginal activity and one that must be continually repeated, because the reversal of roles against the structured hierarchy (or the resolution of injustice) can only be partial and temporary amidst the rise and ebb of all sorts of claims on the term. Revolutionary attempts to establish new systems are not involved, and would not fundamentally change the situation in any case. (11)

The idealist characteristics of the quixotic are present in both Michael Cheyne, in *A Grain of Truth*, and Leon Davies, the protagonist in *The Bellarmine Jug*, as they are each driven by a ceaseless quest to see the justice of the law prevail.

Michael, for example, must decide if he will take a clear moral stance against a talented, favoured partner in the law business. Though it costs him personally, he chooses to stand for what he believes is right, but the narrative does not close on a high moral note in which the law vindicates the truth. Instead the story remains open-ended, the final passage sowing a seed of doubt that the moral decision made in the interest of truth, may also have been motivated by self-interest. The worry is that "[e]verything is connected, but nothing quite fits. . . . No matter how far back in time we go, or who we ask, no one ever knows it all" (273). The open-endedness of the novel provides a deep ideological challenge to the supposed

closure of justice and the law. Justice falls into the interstices, and due to the compromised nature of the law any sense of triumph is momentary and provisional. However, in spite of the ambiguities, Michael refuses to relinquish his pursuit of justice.

In *The Bellarmine Jug*, Leon, too, is a protagonist clown who refuses to give up. Even in mature age Leon is still protesting with students and dreaming of a world without the nuclear bomb, where justice is no longer simply the interest of the stronger party. The novel is primarily set around a series of student disturbances at the Grotius Institute in 1948 which put at risk the noble character of the founder of the Institute, Hugo Grotius, the father of international law. His eminent reputation, and, therefore, that of international law, is at stake. The Warden, Van Riebeck, compromises justice and truth, as well as his own reputation, to uphold the integrity and reputation of Grotius and the Institute. Leon loses his way in the complexity of the situation, and the issue fades away, the Warden succeeding in maintaining the status quo and the reputation of the Institute. In the midst of the confusing moral dilemmas, Leon, like Michael, is a quixotic protagonist who doesn't seek to overturn the established order, but rather each tries to champion the cause of those who have been wronged by the evil in the system, his plaintive, and often compromised, cry being that the system should live up to the high ideals it proclaims.

The naif, like the picaro, stands outside social corruption, but, unlike the picaro, is an unreliable narrator confusing virtue with vice. The naif characterises the position taken by the "Professor" in *Quarantine* and Jack Traverne, in *Truant State*, who earlier was also shown to fit the characterisation of the railer. Jack has a failed love affair with Diana Guy, his childhood sweetheart, and he moves aimlessly from job to job, detached from family and friends, unable to make any strong moral or personal decisions. His life is controlled by the nostalgia and mystery surrounding the heady days of life in Perth when he worked for Diana's father, the business magnate Romney Guy. The shady business deals which have left a legacy of crushed lives, and the murder of Stewart Lacey outside the ball at



Government House, occupy his attention. In search of evidence in London, and at the instigation of friends, he strikes up a momentary relationship with Diana after her marriage has cooled. Jack is unsuccessful in family and business matters, and, even in his surrogate-detective investigations, he has become a dull, introverted character rather than a user of people. Due to the effects of bitterness in unrealised ambitions and disappointment in unfulfilled love, he is often an unreliable, confused and angry narrator.

Similarly, the “Professor” in *Quarantine* is unsuccessful in love. He fantasises about a love affair with the daughter of a fellow passenger, but never actually manages to speak his mind to her. While his sexual naivety lands him in a compromising situation with a prostitute in an Egyptian city, he uses the experience as a humorous story to tell at dinner parties, to salve his conscience from the guilt he still feels for the death of his friend, David Shears. His guilt makes his actions and thoughts as the narrator suspect, for the primary focus of the novel appears to be a justification of his complicity through inaction in the events of the quarantine.

*The Blue Guitar* and *The Hand that Feeds You* have picaresque protagonists. Fletcher defines the picaro as more of a wanderer who is corrupted rather than a quester who acts to create an ideal fantasy world. The picaro is plagued by loneliness which is fostered by the fear to love and by a search for identity. His loveless search for himself makes him a narcissistic user of people and relationships, rather than an enhancer of those he meets. Dyson Garrick in *The Blue Guitar*, who earlier was characterised as a fool, does not have high ideals in dealing with other people’s lives, but rather is tainted with a flawed character which bends the rules for self-protection, in order to escape unscathed from difficult personal situations. Dyson cheats on his wife, and then oscillates on an emotional roller-coaster between breaking off with, or continuing to find solace in, his relationship with his girlfriend. Dyson is a user. He uses his girlfriend to meet his own emotional needs. He breaks faith with his business partner by illegally selling out on him and his invention, the blue transistorised guitar, so he can claw his way out of a debt incurred in another bungled business deal. Although Dyson is

a likeable character, he uses his charm to further his own aims, leaving broken promises and damaged victims in his wake.

Correspondingly, Dee, in *The Hand that Feeds You*, is more of a wanderer than a true quester. His quest for Meynard is almost accidental after he finds the changed state of affairs in Australia, and the ease with which he is corrupted and finally absorbed into the system shows that his quest is really to find himself. In his loneliness he uses, rather than loves, the housekeeper, and he, in turn, is used by his Uncle Roger and others he meets. Cheating, and breaking faith have become a way of life in the futuristic Australia.

Finally, the harlequin is Hasluck-the-writer for *The Country Without Music*, *The Blossville Files*, and *A Grain of Truth* are all set in an imaginary world which parodies the history and institutions of postcolonial Australia. Fletcher quotes Richard Pearce's definition of the harlequin as the "type who self-consciously breaks rules and conventions and delights in the resulting cosmic chaos" (10). At the conclusion of his book, Fletcher draws on Raymond Nichols to suggest

the value of a "harlequin" approach to change within political systems based on a challenging of familiarity with alternative cultural emphases. In these terms, satire may be seen as a particular kind of play that is one especially appropriate mode for the continuation of political discourse without recourse to absolutes or expectations of ultimate resolutions. (157)

Hasluck-the-writer is in his element with the harlequin's unruly magic as he mischievously conjures up a world that, in a kaleidoscope of literary pretence, turns the fixed, sober institutions of Western Australia on their heads. All published in the nineties, Hasluck's latest three novels build a fantasy world where Australia's history, its staid British heritage, its law and reform processes and its place in the world are playfully disrupted and changed. The playfulness is achieved through the introduction of an imaginary French colony juxtaposed to the official British settlement in Western Australia. The history of the French territories goes back to the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars, and includes, in more recent times, the independence wars in Indo-China and the student unrest in Paris

with the occupation of the Sorbonne. The French administration, the lawlessness of the Carnival, the presence of the guillotine, and the imposing structure of the Panoptique (a prison with a central “temple of reason”), all challenge the British record of law and reform in the southern colonies. The setting for the texts is a mix of Western Australian locations, including Rottnest, Perth and the Shark Bay area, as well as many features from the French Pacific islands of New Caledonia. Controversy and confrontation abound, and the reader’s normal historical and intellectual paradigms are stretched and challenged as the laughter of the harlequin energetically resounds through the pages and from between the lines of these multi-coloured, variegated novels.

Hasluck-the-writer’s project is aptly described by Palmeri, when he notes that narrative satire is a genre, or a counter-genre, which

has contributed significantly to the breaking down of rigidly systematised generic distinctions in the last hundred years. Because a genre can condense and imply a way of understanding the world, the parodic juxtaposition of genres by narrative satires implies their interrogation of models of understanding. (13)

Much of Hasluck’s work sits between genres, or at the place of overlap and intersection, where narrative satire most successfully works. However, satire takes its toll on various aspects of fiction, not the least of which are the constructions of the characters themselves. It is Palmeri again who states that “narrative satire reduces all that might be heroic and noble to a common level of physical experience, which it openly acknowledges, if it does not always joyously celebrate” (10). Thus, as argued in the previous chapter, Hasluck’s protagonists are anti-heroes, demonstrating the benign and ineffectual role of the individual amongst the powerful forces which shape society. Nevertheless, in the context of the Menippean satire, Hasluck’s anti-heroes are not destroyed, nor are they left without some sense of optimism, for all the protagonists survive to move on to new yet, no doubt, similar challenges, and hope remains, albeit provisional and, at times, elusive.

## Chapter 4

**Regionalism and the Novels of Nicholas Hasluck**

*. . . shadows of the present linger  
in the past's deceitful dream.*  
(from "A Divided Dream," 4)

As has been argued so far, Hasluck's novels can be analysed in a variety of ways when observed from different frames of reference, or different reading positions. The two main readings so far have been the thriller genre and Menippean satire. The most significant way reviewers and critics have sought to read Hasluck's work is within the constraints of the mystery-thriller, but, as most admit, this limited view can cause the novels to appear inadequate when they are compared with the more popular novels of the genre. The unresolved mysteries, the pursuit of philosophical themes unrelated to the central mystery, the constant parodies of heroes and villains and the apparent lack of resolve to deal with generic gaps can easily be interpreted by the reader as a failure of the author to honour the generic contract. Even those novels which are closest to the thriller style, such as *Quarantine* and *The Bellarmine Jug*, produce a large degree of uncertainty when read through strict generic parameters. Similarly, satire also proves to be inadequate as a framework for reading Hasluck's novels, for, with the exception of *The Hand That Feeds You*, the narratives, while parodic, are not authentic satires of the classical mode. As a consequence, persistent attempts to read Hasluck's work through the conventions of the mystery-thriller and satire severely limit an appreciation of the variety of textual and intertextual play in the narratives, and hide the evolving literary techniques employed in the chronological development of the texts.

Therefore, a different, wider framework is needed to interpret Hasluck's work. In the following chapters, it will be argued that the shift from modernism to postmodernism, from assuming meta-narratives to the problematising the

wholeness of the texts, parallels the movement in emphasis between the early and later work. Hasluck's early novels are largely concerned with the examination of the institutions of society, the way they function and the human dimensions and dilemmas they raise, while the later novels are more regional in focus. This current chapter looks broadly at the transformation in the novels, contending that this attribute is particularly exemplified by the transition from universal considerations to regional interests, and this, in turn, has coincided with the replacement of overseas publishing for the local production of texts.

Chapter Five will continue to examine the change in Hasluck's work through the postmodern construct of historiographic metafiction, showing how the novels have always explored the general notions of history and fiction, but the later narratives move to interrogate the compromised nature of specific national and regional histories and fictions. Chapter Six looks at the same displacement through the framework of Foucault's history of penal discipline, and describes the transformation through the model of the quarantine, with its modernistic overtones, and the panoptic, with its postmodern similarities. Finally, Chapter Seven examines the postmodern character of the last three novels, for they parody the very notions of history, literature and regionality. These later works create their own fictional world based on existing fragments of geography and history, thus problematising and examining the conditions and assumptions of the world we inhabit, analysing the processes of meaning-making in literature, history, and Australian culture. The overall argument in the following chapters, then, is that the paradigm of the movement from modernism to postmodernism in Australian and Western society provides a more adequate and productive context through which all Hasluck's novels can be read.

### **Modernity and Australian Literature**

It is debatable when the transition from modernism to postmodernism took place in Australia. In the early twentieth-century, Europe saw the dominance of realist and romantic genres give way to emerging new forms of modernism. Australian

writing, grounded in the realist tradition, was largely unaffected by extreme forms of modernism, such as surrealism and futurism. Nevertheless, the impact of modernism can be seen in the works of such Australian writers as Christina Stead and Patrick White. Julian Croft, in "Responses to Modernism 1915-1965," lists numerous examples of modernist work in Australian literature which have masqueraded under different names, and he claims that modernism was "a substantial part of Australian literary culture by the 1930s" (412). The reason for the apparent lack of recognition of modernistic works in Australian literature is that modernism in Australia was less self-conscious, less pre-occupied with its own existence than it was in Europe (411). Furthermore, Croft argues, the deterministic negativism of European modernism is in contrast to the relative positivism of Australian modernism:

Modernism in Europe was a response to the authoritarian and materialistic beliefs of the nineteenth century, but in Australia it was also a reaction against the widespread acceptance of vitalism and deterministic Darwinism. . . . [which] can be seen in particular in Norman Lindsay's idea of an organic life-force which produced beauty according to pre-existing laws. . . . But it was only an element, for one of the remarkable features of Australian modernism is that, contrary to a 'gloom' thesis that alienation and loss were the principal concerns used to explain the writers of the previous generation, much of the response to the uncertainty of the early twentieth century was a celebration of a meaning beyond mere deterministic explanation. (412)

Australian modernism was able to move beyond the materially deterministic structures which characterised European modernism because of the distinctive conditions within which Australian literature was formed.

While nineteenth-century Australian writers sought to imitate their European colleagues, a difference in literary style was inevitably produced by their isolation, their lack of a stable national self-esteem and their dependence on the harsh Australian environment for their literary themes. Twentieth-century European writers, having the luxury of over-indulged national self-esteems (reflected in

Europe's history of colonisation and their superior attitude to the rest of the world), had the poise to pursue with vigour the despair and hopeless alienation characteristic of much European modernism. In twentieth-century Australia, however, a variant form of modernism arose which had an almost irrational element of future hope in the midst of despair. Writing in the 1960s, Judith Wright, who could hardly be called a modernist writer herself, explains with some insight that Australian optimism came from the antipodean writers' nineteenth-century heritage, their inability to feel truly at home in the vast continent, and the anticipation generated by their incessant quest to find themselves.

We don't read our early poets and writers, except to patronise them and feel ourselves superior. If we did read them – read them, that is, as they wrote, not as we have edited and selected them – we might be surprised and rather uneasy to find that, after all, we twentieth-century Australians are still talking about the same things, in much the same way, as those dim nineteenth-century expatriates and their opposite numbers, the nineteenth-century political idealists. Australia is still, for us, not a country but a state – or states – of mind. We do not yet speak from within her, but from outside: from the state of mind which describes, rather than expresses, its surroundings, or from the state of mind that imposes itself upon, rather than through, landscape and events. (“The Upside Down Hut,” 331)

Wright concludes the article by envisioning a truly alternative, modernist agenda for Australian writers.

Some day we will be able to think of Europe as *our* Antipodes. Only then will the theme of exile, sacrifice, hope be finally worked out, and our house be right-side-up at last. (336)

Such a dream, of European centres and their antipodean margins which one day could be inverted, relies upon an optimistic view which subscribes to the modernistic feature of hegemonic centers. While acknowledging the changes in twentieth-century Australian society when compared to the nationalist era of the 1890s, Wright still sees the major themes of the twentieth-century Australian writer as those of exile (from Britain) and an unaffected optimism. In spite of the desolation of the writer which is mirrored in the real desolation of the landscape,

Wright sees hope in the despair, for death and sacrifice may usher in new perspectives which could contribute to new beginnings.

Thus, for the Australian imagination, with its constant search for self-esteem and identity, and already conditioned to the alienating terror of the Australian landscape, the barrenness of modernism was a familiar place. Using the works of Patrick White as examples, Croft maintains that in modernist writing in Australia, [j]ourneys to the interior might confront a vacuum and death, but insight resulted; twentieth-century families, rather than the nineteenth-century bush, might be 'the nurse[s] and tutor[s] of eccentric minds' but their baleful influence could be broken away from; and the God who had died and whose fertility rites had been forgotten could be invoked and brought to life again by an ordinary farmer (*The Tree of Man*), a German explorer (*Voss*), or a gifted painter (*The Vivisector*). . . . Australian modernism offered some hope, whereas in other cultures a sterile constructivism, a destructive apocalyptic romanticism, irony, and a pervasive anomie had become the order of the day. (412)

In Australian literature, then, optimism countered, redefined, and productively used the arid severity of deterministic European modernism. As Veronica Brady asserts, in *A Crucible of Prophets*, the novels of Patrick White all begin with a sense of imprisonment, with people alone and helpless in a world over which they have no control. Yet the novelist does not accept this helplessness as final. In its different way, in fact, each novel concludes on an affirmative note, with the main character achieving a kind of freedom, won not by transcending but by taking possession of his or her situation, by finding meaning and purpose within it. (72)

For White, claims Brady, sees in the hardness of life in Australia some glimpse of purpose, finds some hope, difficult and unpalatable as that vision might be.

The hope in Australian modernism is similar to the liberal humanist's positive emphasis on human endeavour and goodness. In fact, much of the work of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Australian writers can be linked to a liberal



humanist, or at least to a humanist, perspective. Such an outlook has been a feature of Australia's literature since the early writings of Marcus Clarke and Charles Harpur, through to Henry Lawson and Kylie Tennant. Liberal humanism, which remains a significant ideology in the Western world today, is the view that humankind can be described in universal terms as a single society, such that the setting down of principles for one segment of a national community can be translated to all other nations and people groups on earth. Based on a rationalism that assumes an originary human essence, and, therefore, an implied human morality, it defines a consensus of universal, public agreement between all humankind. This consensus has the appearance of being based on Western mass culture but, in fact, is defined by a minority of educated elites. The associated concept of the "human condition," assumes an homogenous human race, as well as a belief in the autonomous individual. Such thinking is not new, for humanist theory has influenced thinkers from the time of the Enlightenment till the modern era. But the subtle power of liberal humanism can be seen in that it even influences modernism, which is usually categorised as anti-humanist, for it helps patch up the moral gaps and the ethical holes which appear in the West's modernist narrative about itself and others.

Liberal humanist thinking today is apparent in the modernist arguments of the West which underpin such issues as international human rights, environmental sustainability, and humanitarian aid for victims of war and natural disasters. Many Western environmental and humanitarian organisations rely heavily on the acceptance of the liberal humanist philosophy in the West, and they seek to propagate it unashamedly on other non-Western nations. Liberal humanism, especially in the guise of universalism, claims to provide a mirror through which to confront the self, and, therefore, the nation, so as to provide a ray of hope for many in the desolation of modernism. Today's prevailing liberal humanism can be viewed as a social-structuralist form of modernism, in that it is the dominant voice which purports to speak for the institutions of society, such as the law, education and science, as though they, too, are universal in their form and effect. Liberal humanism, along with other structuralist systems, such as Marxism's traditional

political view of society as historically determined, Althusser's neo-Marxist understanding of the institutions of society as ideologically determined, and Lacan's psycho-analytic construction of society as phallogentric and linguistically determined, were at the height of their influence at the end of the nineteen seventies. Late Western modernism speaks with a universalising voice from many different vantage points in a socially constructed world.

But the totalising systems of modernism, with its Western, liberal humanist morality, have not remained unchallenged. With the emergence of postmodernism, all totalising systems have been called into question, and instead of singular voices asserting their validity as ways of making meaning of our world, many differing constructs and ideas are given the opportunity to be heard simultaneously. However, the significance and longevity of postmodernism is hotly debated by critics. Some consider postmodernism to be just an intermediary stage, a forerunner to more substantial critical constructs which will inevitably replace modernism, while others see it as a more permanent device which is superseding and totally replacing modernism. Still other critics see it as irrelevant sophistry, and ignore it. An alternative position, and one which is favoured in this thesis, is that, in a certain sense, the "postmodern function" has always existed in some form as a subversive presence in literature, operating as a natural reaction to the prevailing, dominant, cultural ideology. It is the truant, the carnivalesque, the radical and the disruptive. Thus, in tracing the history of the contemporary notion of postmodernism in literature, it can be argued that both modernism and postmodernism co-exist as a natural consequence to each other's effect. In the past modernism has been the dominant force with postmodernism providing an often unrecognised, internal restraint. Today, however, postmodernism has increased its influence, and may continue to do so, but modernism is also present, and remains a powerful, hegemonic counterbalance to it. Nevertheless, whether temporary, substantial, or ever-present, the discourse of postmodernism is proving to be a very powerful tool through which critiques of the hegemony of Western modernism can be delivered.

## Hutcheon's Postmodernism

Postmodernism has been defined in many ways, but the definition which provides a productive approach for reading Hasluck's work is developed by Linda Hutcheon, in *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988).<sup>17</sup> Hutcheon's central concept of postmodernism includes a non-nostalgic return to the historic past to draw it into the present in an altered form; the problematising of the comfortable and unchallenged structures and conceptions of society; and the use and abuse of the very ideas postmodernism is challenging. Paradoxically, in its use and abuse of ideas, postmodernism is unavoidably involved in reinforcing the notions which it contests. In addition, Hutcheon's definition of postmodernism revolves around the proposition that postmodernism is not just parody, multiplicity, and a revisiting of the past, but is primarily distinguished by its self-awareness. Other epochs and paradigms of literary criticism have also been self-aware, but not in the same way that postmodernism is as it acknowledges its own contradictions, recognising how its own discourses compromise its positioning of itself and limit its voice. Furthermore, it is important to realise that postmodernism is not a product which can be analysed as an independent object, but rather is a process of interaction with other constructs such as modernism, liberal humanism, realism and history. Therefore, postmodernism is not a revolutionary break with the past, for it simply asserts that all ways of seeing things, from the realist to the abstract, and to postmodernism itself, are framed, human constructs through which sense can be made of the world.

Not everyone agrees with Hutcheon's ideas on postmodernism, for as well as many definitions, there are many critics of the notion of the postmodern. For example, John Frow asserts that postmodernism is a

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<sup>17</sup> Kieran Dolin refers to Hutcheon's *A Poetics of Postmodernism* in his articles about Hasluck's work, "Legal Fictions and Nicholas Hasluck's *The Bellarmine Jug*" and "Farrago for Australia: Law, Power and Textuality in Three Novels by Nicholas Hasluck." In each article he links Hutcheon's concept of historiographic metafiction to *The Bellarmine Jug*.

non-concept . . . a quintessentially *ideological* concept, not designating but attempting to fabricate a reality, and for the most banal purposes of cultural or academic self-aggrandisement. (*What Was Postmodernism?*, 8)

He argues that the postmodern is only conceivable as a notion in opposition to modernism, thus postmodernism does not have an independent nature of its own. Hutcheon admits as much when she succinctly states that “postmodernism is both oedipally oppositional and filially faithful to modernism” (88). Nevertheless, postmodernism is useful because its broader project goes well beyond modernism, for it “raises the uncomfortable (and usually ignored) question of the ideological power behind basic aesthetic issues such as that of representation: *whose* reality is being represented . . . ?” (Hutcheon, 182). Postmodernism, then, challenges all representations, including, and especially, those contained within modernism. Most importantly, Hutcheon defines her “poetics of postmodernism” as different from modernism in that it is a constantly changing, interacting process, in contrast to the modernist tendency to view theory and practice structurally – as a product to be categorised and analysed.

Frow, furthermore, contends that two illogical concepts underpin postmodernism. The first is the limitlessness of examples drawn on by different theorists to illustrate their brand of postmodernism, so the postmodern does not constitute a recognisable body of work, and the second is the drive to periodise the modern and postmodern so that certain cultural practices are privileged and their dates and contents concretely defined. In this context, Frow criticises Hutcheon, and other postmodernists such as Mary McLeod, because they seek to describe postmodernism through a privileging of architectural theory.

McLeod, in her article “Architecture,” describes not one but two forms of the postmodern in architecture. McLeod’s first group of architects sees the existence of modernism as an unimportant, self-indulgent aside, and they refuse to even interact with modernism. These postmodernist revivalists, McLeod claims, seek to restore authentically only the pre-modernist designs, and they “view the modern movement as an unfortunate aberration in the tradition of Western architecture, one

which precludes cultural continuity or social expression” (21). It is, however, McLeod’s second group of architects which reflects Frow’s concept of postmodernism as a “reaction to modernism.” This collection of postmodern architectural theorists attempts to transform the modern through a combination of “selective quotation” and innovation which includes both modern and pre-modern concepts (McLeod, 21). The all-inclusive theoretical framework of McLeod’s second group of architects is similar in its arrangement to the constructs which form the basis of Hutcheon’s “poetics of postmodernism.”

Frow is right, then, when he states that, for Hutcheon, architecture is the key for understanding the postmodern. Hutcheon believes that both architecture and literature clearly highlight postmodernism’s challenge to the modernist dichotomy between art and life.

The points of overlap [between architecture and literature] that seem most evident to me are those of the paradoxes set up when modernist aesthetic autonomy and self-reflexivity come up against a counterforce in the form of a grounding in the historical, social and political world. (ix)

The counterforce of social discourses, argues Hutcheon, challenges the autonomous nature of modernist art and seeks to reground the aesthetic in relation to the rest of society’s cultural and political life. Furthermore, she explains:

Postmodern architecture seems to me to be paradigmatic of our seeming urgent need, in both artistic theory *and* practice, to investigate the relation of ideology and power to all of our present discursive structures . . . (36)

Hutcheon supports her argument by quoting Ortega y Gasset, who “has suggested that each epoch prefers a particular genre . . . and the novel (along with architecture) appears to be the postmodern genre most discussed lately . . .” (38).

Hutcheon’s linking of architecture and the novel is a deliberate, strategic act through which she seeks a positive, functional framework through which contemporary theory and practice can be examined, linked, deconstructed, challenged and reformed.

Frow most effectively criticises Hutcheon's argument when he exposes her attempt to represent postmodernism as a recent phenomenon. Hutcheon sets the date for postmodernism's birth in the early 1970s, relating the origins of postmodernism in literature to the beginnings of postmodernism in architecture.<sup>18</sup> This dating of postmodernism is beset with problems, making Hutcheon's model incompatible with many other theorists such as Lyotard and Baudrillard. Moreover, Frow argues, if a consensus on originary dates for postmodernism were possible, then the date for the transition from modernism to postmodernism in literature would be different from that in architecture, for the so-called effects of the postmodern were felt as early as the 1930s in literature, while in architecture the same influences didn't take effect until the 1970s. The time-line of characteristics ascribed to the postmodern, asserts Frow, are quite different in the field of architecture than they are in the domains of literature or painting.

Moreover, by dating the emergence of postmodernism, Hutcheon is in conflict with her own argument, turning postmodernism into an object – an architecturally-defined commodity – rather than maintaining it as process. But, I would argue, postmodern origins neither prove nor disprove the validity of the models and concepts used to describe the phenomena, for the authenticity of origins is itself a notion postmodernism vigorously challenges. So, while some literary theorists seek to pinpoint the year in which postmodernism was born, it seems that, in literature at least, the transition from modernism to postmodernism is so gradual that it cannot be dated, for it is not a change which has simply substituted one critical framework for another, but rather it is the merging of two or more literary forms into an interactive relationship of both coexistence and interaction. It is, indeed, as Hutcheon argues, a dynamic process.

The work of Jean-François Lyotard is helpful in this regard, for Lyotard defines the postmodern as an already-always-present reaction within modernism, not

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<sup>18</sup> For example, one of the major architectural theorists Hutcheon draws on is Charles Jencks, a proponent of the postmodern in architecture. Jencks dates the death of modernity and the birth of postmodernism as the dynamiting of the Pruitt-Igoe housing project in St Louis at 3.32 pm on the 15th July 1972.

merely a linear historical progression in which the postmodern follows the modern. Modernism, then, has always contained within itself a challenge to the powerful concepts which drive it. Thus the *avant-garde* is seen by Lyotard as a postmodern reaction to late-modernism and not as the last fling of a fading modernist era. Lyotard describes it “as a working through – what Freud called *Durcharbeitung* – operated by modernity on itself” (“Defining the Postmodern,” 173). This process, claims Lyotard, of a reaction to the modern which begins within the modern itself, describes the “post” in postmodern. It is a process of interaction and transformation, rather than a chronological progression of types. Thus, it can be argued that, while the postmodern has become increasingly dominant as a theoretical construct, it still retains the influences of the modern.

Umberto Eco goes even further than Lyotard, noting, in *Reflections on The Name of the Rose*, that postmodernism has been made increasingly retroactive. He argues that postmodernism is not a trend to be chronologically defined, but, rather, an ideal category – or better still, a *Kunstwollen*, a way of operating. We could say that every period has its postmodern . . . (66)

He goes on to clarify his argument that the postmodern can be applied to many authors going way back, and

in the same artist the modern moment and the postmodern moment can coexist, or alternate, or follow each other closely. . . . [The postmodern] demands, in order to be understood, not the negation of the already said, but its ironic rethinking. (68)

The ironic rethinking of the novel and society in Hasluck’s work is done in a setting where the theoretical emphasis is demonstrably moving from a modernist to a postmodern perspective. However, although the elements of modernism and postmodernism react to one another with varying strengths through the passage of time, they coexist rather than supersede each other.

The concept of a process which arises out of its own internal reaction is a framework which fits the development of Hasluck’s novelistic discourse particularly well. The novels cannot be distinctly classified into either category of

modern or postmodern, but rather can be read as a progression beginning with modernist works which have an internal postmodern reaction, moving through to works with a stronger emphasis on the postmodern while still retaining vestiges of the modern. What becomes important in Hasluck's narratives, then, is the challenging of the often unquestioned modernist constructs which give the institutions of society their apparent stability and illusion of timeless truth. These unquestioned constructs are the master or meta-narratives which arise in Western thought and seek to dominate humankind through their all-inclusive, theoretical systems.

Postmodernism, asserts Hutcheon, contests the stability and timelessness of all master narratives, or the meaning-making processes of our culture, including its own meta-narrative.

Rorty, Baudrillard, Foucault, Lyotard, and others seem to imply that any knowledge cannot escape complicity with some meta-narrative, with the fictions that render possible any claims to 'truth,' however provisional. What they add, however, is that *no* narrative can be a natural 'master' narrative: there are no natural hierarchies; there are only those we construct. It is this kind of self-implicating questioning that should allow postmodern theorising to challenge narratives that do presume to 'master' status, without necessarily assuming that status for itself. . . . The contradictions of both postmodern theory and practice are positioned within the system and yet work to allow its premises to be seen as fictions or as ideological structures. This does not necessarily destroy their 'truth' value, but it does define the conditions of that 'truth.' (Hutcheon, 13)

Hutcheon's view of postmodernism, therefore, is conservative, in that it acknowledges its own complicity in the theories it challenges, for while it parodies the master narratives it does not entirely overthrow them. But such postmodernism is also radical in that it totally undermines the dominance and the assumptions of all master narratives, including the modernist and liberal humanist structures, challenging the grounds which give them the apparent legitimacy to speak for all humankind.



Postmodernism's paradoxical complicity in the master narratives it critiques is seen in its exposure of the hidden nature of liberal humanism in modernism through the medium of the novel.<sup>19</sup> "Like much of contemporary theory," claims Hutcheon,

the postmodernist novel puts into question that entire series of interconnected concepts that have come to be associated with what we conveniently label as liberal humanism: Autonomy, transcendence, certainty, authority, unity, totalisation, system, universalisation, centre, continuity, teleology, closure, hierarchy, homogeneity, uniqueness, origin. As I tried to argue, however, to put these concepts into question is not to deny them – only to interrogate their relation to experience, without the kind of foreclosing assurance that the epigraph suggests. (57)

Postmodernism can powerfully challenge the dominance of master narratives through the genre of the novel because in many ways the novel functions as a small, self-contained world controlled by its own master narrative.

Furthermore, novels allow a critique of master narratives because all novels are intertextual by nature, and are dependent on, and complicit with, the master narratives of genre and discourse. The novelistic critique can be performed through highlighting the fragmentary nature of texts, the use of parody, and the deploying of polyphony, or multiple voices and interpretations. The use of fragmentation and parodic voices, for example, certainly contests the meta-narrative of liberal humanism.

Copies, intertexts, parodies – these are among the concepts which have challenged humanist notions of originality and universality. Together with positivistic science, humanism has also tended to mask what current theory wants to unmask: the idea that language has the power to constitute (and not only to describe) that which it represents. According to this perspective, there can be no value-neutral discourses – not even science or history, and certainly not literary criticism and theory. (Hutcheon, 192)

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<sup>19</sup> Hutcheon sees the exposure of liberal humanism as one of the primary projects of postmodernism.

Parody is a device widely used in postmodern novels, for, claims Hutcheon, it is “a perfect postmodern form” in that it interrogates by incorporating and challenging (11). The use of parody through literary fragments and polyphonic narratives destroys the power of the privileged position within the binary structures of the master narrative. In the modernist system of binaries, meaning comes from the privileging of one side of the dialectic over the other: to bring closure, to conceal contradictions and to allow for wholeness. The lack of binaries in the postmodern, however, requires meaning to come from engagement, where everything exists in a simultaneous process of contradiction and change.

Furthermore, it is the lack of binaries in the postmodern which leads Hutcheon to maintain that perhaps the most significant feature of postmodernism is its self-reflexivity. The strength of postmodernism’s self-reflexivity is that it allows a far greater awareness of the unquestioned processes and devices used to construct the various narratives which seek to describe the reality of our existence.

“Postmodernism,” according to Hutcheon,

teaches that all cultural practices have an ideological subtext which determines the conditions of the very possibility of their production of meaning. . . . Wilfully contradictory, then, postmodern culture uses and abuses conventions of discourse. It knows it cannot escape implications in the economic (late capitalist) and ideological (liberal humanist) dominants of its time. There is no outside. All it can do is question from within. It can only problematise what Barthes . . . has called the ‘given’ or ‘what goes without saying’ in our culture. . . . (xii-xiii)

The cultural ‘given’ or ‘what goes without saying’ requires a consensus which is similarly assumed as a given, and it underlies all human constructs which are master narratives. Postmodernism, too, operates on a consensus, but it realises its own constructedness and calls into question, what Hutcheon labels, humanist “repairs” (the assertions made about society to patch up the gaps and holes which appear in the narratives). Postmodernism self-reflexively maintains that the repairs, including its own, are also human constructs. While postmodernism is especially critical of the liberal humanist framework, it parodies it in a positive way, because

it recognises that all narratives are human constructs, but it is “from that very fact [of their constructedness], they derive their value as well as their limitation. All repairs are both comforting and illusory” (7). Postmodernism, then, does not fully endorse nor completely deny either the comfort or the illusion of the liberal humanist narrative.

While master narratives of some description are inevitable, it is the nature and function of postmodernism to question all such constructs. In this way, postmodernism functions as a tool which problematises and challenges, and thus is more a reading practice for interrogating discourses than a philosophy which coherently expounds a universal meaning-making theory from a particular set of origins.

Within such a ‘postmodernist’ ideology, all a poetics of postmodernism would do would be self consciously to enact a metalinguistic contradiction of being inside and outside, complicitous and distanced, inscribing and contesting its own provisional formations. Such an enterprise would obviously not yield any universal truths but, then again, that would not be what it sought to do. To move from the desire and expectation of sure and single meaning to a recognition of the value of differences and even contradictions might be a tentative first step to accepting responsibility for both art and theory as *signifying processes*. In other words, maybe we could begin to study the implications of both our *making* and our *making sense* of our culture.” (Hutcheon, 21)

Postmodernism, as it challenges the meaning-making processes of our culture, contests not only the wholeness of master narratives, but also the nature of the apparently coherent subject within the narrative, and the apparent unity of the narrator’s persona. In works of literary fiction postmodernism problematises literary conventions, political stances, historical perspectives and theoretical frameworks.

The emergence of postmodernism as a useful and powerful tool of literary critique has been brought about by the paradigm shift from modernism to postmodernism –

from a focus on singular, Eurocentric voices to a problematising of the master voice through a polyphony of texts and centres – and this movement has provided a liberating climate for Australian literature as a whole. The change in the literary approaches of the West has offered Australian writers the break they have needed to develop and propagate their talents in a more accepting environment, and this has resulted in a phenomenal growth in Australian literature since the nineteen seventies. With postmodernism, then, Australia has come of age in a literary sense, both in terms of its authors and its readers, for postmodernism has given Australian writers both the opportunity to be published, and the tools with which to critique the hegemony of the European centre. Formerly, modernism in Europe constructed a sense of universal sameness radiating out from that centre, but postmodernism has allowed a multiplicity of centres and the flowering of regional and minority publications. The many centres of literary thought and achievement are still hegemonic, but their multiplicity in the English-reading world has meant that Australian authors are no longer dependent on British publishers and British critics for the success of their novels.<sup>20</sup> Thus, it could be argued, the postmodern phenomenon is a happy one for Australian literature.

## Regionalism

The lot of the Australian novelist has customarily been a difficult one, for from the early days of Australia's literary development until the 1970s, Australian novels were mostly published through publishing houses in Britain. From the mid nineteenth-century the occasional local story was published in serial form through Australian magazines, such as Marcus Clarke's *For the Term of His Natural Life* in the *Australian Journal*, Louis Stone's *Jonah* in *The Lone Hand* and C.J. Dennis's *The Sentimental Bloke* in the *Bulletin*. However, most of the local writing

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<sup>20</sup> A similar argument is used in postcolonial theory for the emergence of colonial literatures, but not all theorists consider Australian literature to be postcolonial. According to Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra, in *The Dark Side of the Dream*, Australian literature has not broken away from its European cultural centre, but is "still determined massively by its complicity with an imperialistic enterprise" (x). This thesis does not enter into the debate on postcolonial issues, but instead argues that postmodernism, as a Western construct, allows Australia's Western-style literature to both critique European hegemony and, at the same time, maintain some viable economic and literary independence through the existence of local publishing houses.

published in the magazines were poems and short stories, rather than novels, the two best-known authors being Henry Lawson and A.B. "Banjo" Paterson. From those early days, writing and publishing in Australia has had its own particular problems. Ian Turner, for example, quotes Lawson as estimating in 1899, "that twelve years of authorship had earned him only seven hundred pounds" ("The Social Setting," 36). Even with the establishment of Angus and Robertson as an Australian publishing house in 1886, the financial returns for Australian authors were very small. A further problem was that popular writing in Australia was a reaction against the "old-world" centre. As Turner notes concerning the pre-Federation writers, their

tone of voice was unselfconsciously, unmistakably, and often 'offensively' . . . democratic, lower-class Australian – and this was possibly the first time in any literature that this had been the dominant tone. . . . They rejected old-world models, both literary and social; they spoke the vernacular and spurned romance. (34)

To gain greater recognition and a wider audience, Australian writers often published and lived overseas. They had to endure the tension between writing for an Australian audience in the anti-old-world style realism popular in Australia, or writing for a broader, worldwide audience which usually meant suffering rejection by Australian readers and humiliation by Australian literary critics. The author who most successfully negotiated this divide in the 1950s and 1960s was the modernist writer, Patrick White, though he, too, had to endure his fair measure of local criticism.

It was in the legacy of this environment that Hasluck began to write his novels in the late 1970s. However, in addition to his marginalisation as an Australian writer, he was further marginalised because he was a Western Australian far removed from the literary centres of Sydney and Melbourne. It is little wonder, then, like many Australian novelists, Hasluck's literary career took a while to establish itself. He explains, in an article "Getting Published," how at the beginning of his writing career he made several unsuccessful attempts to publish an Australian novel in Australia, and, finally, he turned overseas, knowing that his "next work could not

afford to be topical and would have to be located outside Australia; the setting preferably exotic, and therefore more likely to be of interest to publishers in London or New York" (92-93). For Western Australian writers, the close of the 1970s was the end of an era. It was a time referred to by Ray Coffey, a contemporary Western Australian publisher, as the "days of the gentleman publisher in London supporting colonial writing . . ." (Nowland, "It's a Centre of Real Success," 50). In this context, then, it is not surprising to find that both of Hasluck's early novels which were published overseas were largely modernist in style, having so-called universal themes within a liberal humanist framework and ambiguous settings. The modernist, universalistic approach did, indeed, appeal to the paternalistic editors at the hegemonic centres of the English-speaking world.<sup>21</sup>

Hasluck's first published novel, *Quarantine*, is set in an exotic location and, being "non-topical" – by which Hasluck meant having universal rather than regional themes – was published in 1978 by Macmillan of London, and a year later by Holt, Rinehart and Winston of New York. *Quarantine*, like William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, is a cautionary tale of a small community which finds itself insulated from the outside world. This controlled environment allows for the examination of the human condition in a setting isolated from the distractions and complications of modern, urbanised society. In Hasluck's narrative, the journey of an old rusting steamer is interrupted and its passengers are unceremoniously dumped at an isolated quarantine station somewhere in the desert along the Suez Canal. Rumours abound as to the reason behind the quarantine, but the truth is never revealed. Hearsay includes stories of a mysterious burial at sea, a sick child at the quarantine station and even the possibility of a diplomatic row between Britain and Egypt. The relationships between the passengers from the steamer change, and the regimental Englishman, Burgess, takes command. Burgess, an ex-colonial administrator from

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<sup>21</sup> Veronica Brady upheld this view of Hasluck's work in writing a review of Australian literature in 1982. (Hasluck's writing at that time consisted of short stories, poems and his first two novels). In her article, "Place, Taste and the Making of a Tradition: Western Australian Writing Today," she describes Hasluck's novels as expressing "an ironic and sophisticated sense of self and the world, cosmopolitan rather than provincial in tone as well as theme" (105). Accordingly, she largely ignored Hasluck in her literary review of Western Australian work. However, in later articles, such as "An Approach to Vigilance: The Politics of Nicholas Hasluck's *The Country Without Music*" and the introduction to *Offcuts*, Brady writes about the postmodern and regional aspects of Hasluck's work, again further supporting the critical reading of this thesis.

British India, seeks to place some order on the disorder of the quarantine situation. In the ensuing events the desire for order actually creates disorder. Abnormalities and transgressions proliferate, and the responsibility of the individual becomes submerged to the demands of the group.

The novel explores the issues of the abdication of personal responsibility, the deceptive nature of collective guilt, the insidious overtones of dictatorial incompetence and the evil of mob-hysteria. *Quarantine* particularly questions the relationship of human society and the law, and it explores these concerns within the somewhat elastic parameters of the mystery-thriller genre. Genre, as a cultural and ideological structure, allows for universal readings (universal in the modernist sense in which the West feels that its readings of the world are the way everyone should read the world). Through a modernist generic reading, then, *Quarantine* becomes a mirror which reflects back to Western readers an uncanny image of themselves, and reaffirms the already known and familiar Western world view as the structure which underlies all societies. It becomes, in Dorothy Colmer's words not only the thriller described on the dust-jacket, but also "a fable for our time" (8). Kobulniczky agrees, claiming the novel is a moral fable, for it seeks to describe the human condition as known to the Western mind, and explores what can be known of its relationship to the law, history and memory, both within the individual and within society.

The moral fable in *Quarantine* has liberal humanist overtones, for the novel is an exploration of the human condition via the medium of the narrator's confession, which he gives ostensibly to alleviate the guilt of his inaction. The novel is a modernist monologue, which, using the isolated setting and the uncertain, hesitant, often bewildered voice of the narrator, explores the drive within the West to constitute, control and define all human society through the narrow scope of Western law, especially its concept of jurisprudence, or the philosophy of universal, natural law. Thus, the narrator does not regard his confession as applying to himself alone, for he sees all modern people as inactive spectators of the crimes constantly being perpetrated against innocent lives. The knowledge of

the collective guilt of the inactive community eases the shame of the narrator, as he describes all urban people as equally-unwilling-but-trapped participants in the crimes of humanity, for, as they sit as spectators before their television sets, they become, due to their “inability to resist events, a participant, a barbarian at the gate, a horror-stricken protagonist on all that happens anywhere in the world” (130). However, in a twist with satirical dimensions, it is revealed that the real infection which is being fought at the quarantine, the actual disease of humanity’s unwitting participants, is not inaction but rather the desire to intervene, to reform society. The true knowledge of what is happening in society, as portrayed by the isolated community of the quarantine, resides with the experienced, mysterious Dr Magro. He shows, through his example, the healthy soundness of inaction, and as the expert on infectious disease at the quarantine he believes in reticence, that silence is often best, and that immunisation is sometimes more dangerous than the disease itself. This knowledge has come to him after many years in the Sudan. Thus the guilt of inaction felt by the confessor-narrator is turned aside, and resistance, standing up, becomes the affliction to be feared, quarantined and exterminated from the human race.

Hasluck’s second novel, *The Blue Guitar* (1980), is set in an indeterminate Australian location,<sup>22</sup> and again, being “non-topical” in developing universal rather than regional issues, was published by Macmillan of London. *The Blue Guitar*’s focus is mainly on social concerns, especially the issues of integrity and honesty in the worlds of business and family life. It raises the questions of morality and truth; the ethics of trading with another person’s intellectual property; and the issues concerned with denial and the withholding of vital information to gain an economic advantage. Remarkably, this universalistic novel published in 1980 was strangely

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<sup>22</sup> Indeterminate in the sense that there are no strong physical or social factors which link the novel to a particular place. For a discussion on the possibilities argued by the critics, the comments proffered by the Hasluck-the-critic and the options favoured by this thesis, see relevant footnote in Chapter One. What is important is that to the London publishers the novel could have been set in any Western, urban location.



prophetic of the WA Inc era which consumed Western Australia in the succeeding years, and it was reprinted with an appropriate fanfare by Penguin in 1989.<sup>23</sup>

While Hasluck's first two novels were predominantly modernist, liberal humanist works having universal applications, with his third novel, *The Hand That Feeds You* (1982), came a major alteration in direction. Significantly, *The Hand That Feeds You* was the first of Hasluck's novels to be published by the Fremantle Arts Centre Press. The FACP, a small, regional publishing house which began in Western Australia in 1975 as a project of the Fremantle Arts Centre, is committed to publishing work by West Australians.<sup>24</sup> For Hasluck-the-writer, the publication of a novel through a local press saw the beginnings of more overtly regional concerns in his narratives, and gave him a greater freedom to experiment with theme, text and reader in a characteristically postmodern way. Hutcheon explains the difference as a shift from modernism's alienated otherness and sameness to postmodernism's celebration of "differences, that is to the assertion, not of centralised sameness, but of decentralised community – another postmodern paradox" (12). The publishing world's decentred centres gave Australian novelists like Hasluck new opportunities for publication and new horizons to explore in terms of local and regional concerns.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> As a point of balance, however, it should be noted that attributing universal themes to Hasluck's first two novels does not mean that they haven't been influenced by Hasluck's Western Australian heritage. The desert sands in *Quarantine*, and the city in *The Blue Guitar*, all embrace elements of Western Australia. Similarly, in the same article in which she largely ignores Hasluck's work, Brady writes that Peter Cowan's work expresses the attributes of Western Australia through the themes of isolation, inaction, menace and entrapment. Each of these "Western Australian" themes are key issues in both of these novels of Hasluck.

<sup>24</sup> For reflections by people involved in the early history and development of the FACP see "'A Two Book Wonder': A Decade of Publishing: Fremantle Arts Centre Press 1976-1986" by Ian Templeman, and "Rolling Column: Fremantle Arts Centre Press: Twenty Years On" by Clive Newman.

<sup>25</sup> In an interview on *Quarantine* with Geraldine Doogue, Hasluck-the-critic suggests that Hasluck-the-writer owed an early debt to the Fremantle Arts Centre for the publication of his book of poetry, *Anchor and Other Poems*, and his collection of short stories, *The Hat on the Letter O*: "It gave me a lease of life at a time when the future looked pretty bleak." Doogue comments that without the FACP Hasluck "doubts whether he'd have had too much chance of registering his name nationally" (Literary View, 8). The FACP, then, probably influenced Hasluck's novel-writing career twice over, firstly, building his profile through his poetry and short stories so his novels (which were being rejected by Australian editors) were accepted by overseas publishers, and then, secondly, eventually allowing Hasluck-the-novelist to publish locally and write on regional issues.

*The Hand That Feeds You* is entirely Australian in its themes and content. Along with its regional emphasis as a satire on the Australian way of life, *The Hand That Feeds You* also displays a more postmodern disposition than Hasluck's earlier novels, for it demonstrates greater self-awareness and freedom to parody the institutions of society, including the craft of literature itself. The regionality of the themes and the self-awareness of a project of writing which parodies itself, refusing to take itself seriously, establish the postmodern style of Hasluck's later work. In contrast to the universalism of the first two novels, the later novels recognise and play with the limits of their discourses, the multiplicity of their meanings, the changeableness of their frameworks of truth, and the regionality of their settings. They are self-aware novels, in that it is made clear that as literary texts, they are limited and contextual, while at the same time they can be used to interrogate issues of politics, history and literature in either a creative or a destructive way.

*The Hand That Feeds You* is specifically located in Sydney, with the Domain, the Opera House and the Bridge featuring in the landscape. Its themes are particularly antipodean, as it is a satire on the institutions of Australian democracy, covering such issues as unionism, egalitarianism, the social welfare net, the political system of democratic representation and the ideology of self-interest. The postmodernist emphasis on decentring and the regional is evident in the nature of the issues raised in *The Hand That Feeds You*, for the text has an antipodean focus, critiquing and questioning the Australian way of life rather than the "universal" human condition. Furthermore, although the satire is more of a modernist literary form (in that like a classical satire it carries a strong suggestion of authorial intent) it still has postmodern devices, such as the lack of closure and the tear-out literary reviews.

The second major modification in Hasluck's work comes with his fourth novel, *The Bellarmine Jug*, which won the 1984 *Age* Book of the Year Award. His reputation established, Hasluck-the-writer began his publishing relationship with Penguin Books Australia. But with broader market exposure Hasluck has continued even more rigorously to pursue regional concerns and to experiment with

postmodern devices. *The Bellarmine Jug*, for example, although its themes and the setting are decidedly international, sets the regional tone for Hasluck's future writing, for it is his first in-depth expansion of Western Australian concerns. The strong regionality of Hasluck's work is evident in that throughout his novels there is no mention of what could be termed "All-Australian" historical concerns, such as the first fleet, Botany Bay, convicts, bushrangers, Ned Kelly, the Eureka Stockade, or larrikins of the order of the Sentimental Bloke. The All-Australian history, which stands behind the All-Australian identity, is held up as the national history in all states of Australia, even though the story has more to do with New South Wales and Victoria than with the other states and territories. Western Australia, for example, has an early history as a free settlement, not a penal colony; it has had no "squatters" and "settlers" quarrels over land tenure; bushranging has had little impact; there has been no Eureka Stockade; and the larrikins of the push have never roamed the slums of the isolated, "English town" of Perth.

It is these sentiments which cause Patrick O'Brien, in "Western Values," to claim that the "true history of Australia lies in the history of its strongly individualistic states and regions, not in the imagination of the peddlers of essentially nineteenth-century nationalist myths" (44). O'Brien calls the All-Australian history "the 'theme park' interpretation" (44). In contrast to the eastern states, the early long-term poverty and hardship of the colony in Western Australia produced a society conditioned to a sense of despondency and mediocrity, but also a community in which loyalty and pulling together were strong virtues. O'Brien comments:

Size, geography, isolation, immigration, land tenure and the nature and means of economic production conspired, as it were, to develop a form of kinship among Western Australians (during the period of 'genteel poverty') in which the government played an important part. Thus Western Australians tended to limit their controversies and conflicts so that they did not threaten the whole. The Kalgoorlie riot of 1898, 1899, 1919 and 1934, after the initial outburst, gained little support or sympathy among workers in the goldfields or elsewhere in Western Australia. (47)

O'Brien concludes that the heroes and myths of the eastern states are "about as relevant to Western Australians as the heroes and myths of medieval England" (47).

Surprisingly, on the literary front, the colony of Western Australian made a good start. In the first two decades of its existence it produced nine newspapers (which published much lively debate and original poetry) and a great deal of detailed journal and diary entries, so that George Seddon comments, it was "not merely a literate society, but even in some degree a literary one" ("The Persistence of Place," 65). But in the next three decades, which saw the introduction of convict labour, the settlers did not produce the same rich documentation. Seddon reasons that the

group psychology of the colonists during the convict era suggests acute withdrawal. The day-to-day grind of making a living in an infertile land must have taken its toll, but there must also have been a great loss of self-esteem when transportation began. The Swan River colony had seen itself as a colony of gentlemen and was sustained by pride in the first two decades that fed partly on contempt for the 'pick-pocket Colonies of the east.' When this powerful psychological prop was withdrawn, their little world seems to have closed in on itself. (67-68)

This gap, along with others, in the literature of Western Australia can only be filled by the speculative writing of fictional histories, either with history as literature or literature as history.

A key point about Western Australian difference is picked up by O'Brien when he notes Martyn and Audrey Webbs's remark that Western Australia commemorates its important people by "folk memory rather than by heroic statues" (46). O'Brien pushes this observation further, commenting that Western Australia's important people (and by inference, events) are also "not commemorated in myths. And herein lies the explanation for the principal difference between Western Australia and the 't'othersider' . . ." (46). Hasluck, as a regional writer, sets about making, and then challenging, myths of Western Australia. Some of the history he seeks to

mythologise through his speculative writing are events the “theme park” Australian history seems to want to forget, for they are marginal, threatening regional episodes which have little place in the national narrative which backgrounds and elucidates the All-Australian identity. These myth-producing, speculative histories are especially developed in Hasluck’s next two novels.

The common thread through *The Bellarmine Jug*, for example, is the *Batavia* mutiny of 1629, with all the horror of the cold-blooded murder of over 120 innocent people, Pelsaert’s return, and the sequel of grisly revenge against the mutineers which involved the chopping off of hands, the hanging of some and the forced marooning of others on the desolate Western Australian coast. The neglect of this regional history had previously led Henrietta Drake-Brockman to produce her work on Pelsaert, *Voyage to Disaster*, in 1963. The continuing historical limbo to which Pelsaert and the *Batavia* mutiny have been condemned is highlighted by Hasluck-the-critic as he rues the fact that Drake-Brockman’s work “has been shamefully neglected since her death” (*Yacker*, 177).<sup>26</sup> But Hasluck-the-writer is not content to retell neglected regional histories in an orthodox way. Instead, he invents a speculative history, introducing a strange cross-fertilisation of international events and religious beliefs.

But the postmodern nature of this text is not limited to retelling regional histories, for the reader discovers at the end of the narrative that *The Bellarmine Jug* is not just a history written by Hasluck-the-writer, but it is also a fictional novel written by the narrator, Leon Davies, in honour of a retired lecturer from the Grotius Institute, the international law school at the centre of the intrigue. Consequently, although the reader knows that the book is a work of fiction, he or she is not left with that knowledge in an unquestioned form, but is presented with it clearly on the page. By this postmodern questioning of the nature of the text, *The Bellarmine Jug* parodies the telling of Australia’s history and exposes the fictional nature of the nation’s narration of its own story. The convolutions of the novel and the

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<sup>26</sup> Alexandra Hasluck wrote articles on Drake-Brockman in *Meanjin* and *Westerly* in 1968. Both the articles indicate that Drake-Brockman is a close family friend and make reference to her historical work on Pelsaert.

shifting boundaries between truth and conjecture are summed up by the lecturer who states: “The blend of fact and fantasy. One knows scarcely where it begins and where it ends” (259). This blend, or double play, characterises both the composition and the themes of *The Bellarmine Jug*.

The WA Secession Movement of 1933, when West Australians voted overwhelmingly (138,653 votes for to 70,706 against) to leave the Commonwealth of Australia, is another event many All-Australian histories seem to want to forget. The heady, extraordinary days of the secession movement are a major theme in Hasluck’s fifth novel *Truant State* (1987). This narrative is the most transparently regional of Hasluck’s novels for it is set almost entirely in Western Australia, from the elite suburb of Peppermint Grove in Perth, to Kalgoorlie on the goldfields and Northcliffe in the giant karri country of the South-West. The local character of the novel is borne out most clearly in the reviews, for many Eastern States reviewers are somewhat scathing of a book they see as insubstantial – especially after the complexity of *The Bellarmine Jug*. But a review by a local writer, Hal Colebatch, is far more favourable, and, perhaps, more insightful. Colebatch states that

the ultimate theme is one which seems deep in the Australian (or West Australian?) psyche: the conflict between the man of vision, the victims of such vision, and the country which has shown little use for visionaries.

Many of the characters appear under their real names or are identifiable or recognisable pastiches, but Hasluck is more than a historical novelist. . . .

West Australians know they are not like other Australians. In a myriad of tiny ways, history and culture as well as geography have set them apart. It is one of Hasluck’s literary triumphs that he has managed to capture this elusive sense of otherness. (“Rich Shadows,” 14)

The regionality of *Truant State* allows for a parochial “home town” reading of the text, and, while any person could enjoy the novel as a fictional narrativisation of certain minor historical events, it is those who are aware of West Australia’s marginalised history and milieu who can appreciate a deeper reading of the work.

From a literary viewpoint, *Truant State* displays its postmodernity in its disruptive, sudden transpositions into direct address to the reader. Each of the major breaks in the novel – “Part I, Arrival” (11-12), “Part II Growth” (105), and “Part III Secession” (195-96) – is introduced with a monologue directed at the reader, the narrator even losing his temper and swearing at the reader in the introduction to Part III. In anger Jack tells the reader, “Stick to the story of your own life if you prefer it, that discursive farce, that self-created mystery to which you’ll never know the end” (197). Then, almost as an action to placate Jack’s anger towards the reader, in the last pages of the novel the narration follows Jack’s suggestion mentioned above and switches to second-person, so this time you, the reader, are the victim, sitting in the car outside the ball at Government House, and you can hear and smell the approach of the murderer to the murder scene and you know your end has come. So Hasluck-the-writer disrupts the harmony of the narrative voice, creating a sense of dislocation in the reader, challenging the traditional ending of a mystery-thriller by personally identifying the reader with the last moments of the victim. Yet, ironically, the reader already knows the story of what has happened in the many years after the events of that evening. Such devices are ironic and postmodern in their disruption of the wholeness of the subject, and overturn the reliability of the conventions of the narrator, the reader, and the narrative.

As a writer who increasingly draws on his Western Australian heritage, Hasluck uses the issues of regionalism and the devices of postmodernism to question and problematise the mundane, often hidden, worlds of history, literature and the law, and he spends less critical effort on the currently more central and politically correct institutional sites of race, gender and class. Susan McKernan argues that foregrounding regionalism in Australia as an important classification for writers brings with it the threat of urban conformity due to the lack of regional difference in Australia.<sup>27</sup> According to Beth Watzke, when categorising Australian writers McKernan

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<sup>27</sup> See McKernan’s article, “Crossing the Border: Regional Writing in Australia,” *Meanjin* 45.4, 1986.

sees sex, class and race as having more of an impact on a writer than place or region, and notes that regional studies are often concerned only with writers who have a declared regional interest, ignoring any who are different. ("Writing the West," 23)

Watzke, however, criticises McKernan's view which "seems to privilege diversity, while proving that none actually exists; Australian writers do not actually differ all that much from place to place" (23). While, on the one hand, Hasluck-the-writer does not entirely ignore issues of gender, class and race, on the other hand, he is also not regional in the sense of being the same as other Western Australian writers. Watzke, for example, cites Peter Cowan, Elizabeth Jolley, Dorothy Hewett and Tim Winton as Western Australian writers for whom landscape is central to their concept of place as they explore, what she calls, the territories of the earth and the mind. Hasluck's novels, however, are more concerned with ideas than with landscape or people, and only *Truant State* is strongly Western Australian in its geographical setting. Instead, Hasluck-the-writer explores, and rigorously challenges, the ideas of a state. This is especially true in the next change of direction in his work.

The third major variation in Hasluck's work comes with his sixth novel, *The Country Without Music* (1990) and continues through *The Blossville File* (1992) and *A Grain of Truth* (1995). These novels are speculative both in terms of history and place, so that they parody the very concept of regionalism itself. Having earned recognition as a local writer, Hasluck challenges the concept of regionalism by subverting the purity and strength of Western Australia's unique history and geography through which it contests the dominance of the national narration.

In his novels, Hasluck-the-writer fuses the regional sites of New Caledonia, Shark Bay, Rottnest and Perth, and he merges the narratives told of French and British colonisation. Leslie Marchant, in *France Australe*, a history of the French on the Western Australian coast, documents the ineptitude and inaction which stopped the French establishing a colony on Australia's western seaboard. However, rather than leaving the French out of the antipodes, Hasluck rewrites the history of the



Southern Seas, declaring that a few years after Captain Cook's voyage, "Francois Alesno Comte de St Allouarn, claimed the West coast of *Grande Terre* for the French" (*Country Without Music*, 16). In Hasluck's vision, due to the Napoleonic Wars, France was unable to complete the process of annexation, but it retained two offshore islands as a penal colony, as well as a few fertile districts on the mainland for occupation by free settlers.

When questioned as to whether or not this latest shift into an imaginary world still means he is a regional writer, Hasluck-the-critic responds:

I suppose I am, if your definition of a regional writer is someone who evokes atmosphere and themes which have a particular relevance for a region. . . .

There may be a certain resistance to this kind of regionalism among readers who generally prefer the familiar, but from my point of view, crucial in getting the words on paper, I see it as a liberating influence.

("The Anarchy at the Core," 18)

This imaginary domain, which brings with it a freedom far beyond the strictures of regional landscapes, whether rural or urban, allows Hasluck-the-writer to do what Watzke sees other Western Australian writers doing, that is, raising

issues about the boundaries of consciousness and apprehension of place; about the tensions between geographical and imaginative space; about the role of language itself as a mode of power (who decides what is regional? Who decides whether it is important or trivial, and why?). ("Writing the West," 28)

In this sense Hasluck is a productive and challenging regional writer, and the movement of his work into a more postmodern setting allows him to use and abuse regional issues with greater self-awareness. These postmodern, regional aspects of Hasluck's work demand a closer examination, and it is to these issues we will now turn our attention.

One central area of self-awareness important to both Hasluck-the-writer and postmodernism is the nature and relationship of history and literature. In history

and literature, we – the local, the regional, the nation, and humankind – tell our own story, constructing our own imagination of ourselves in very powerful ways. Postmodernism, with its emphasis on the regional and its affinity with the novel, is especially well placed to explore the assumptions of literature and the meta-histories told by us. Hasluck's novels, in particular his later ones, explore the boundaries between literature and history, and as such they are particularly open to be read through Hutcheon's concept of the postmodern device of historiographic metafiction.

## Chapter 5

**Historiographic Metafiction: Literature and History**

*Some say that the past is a lantern show,  
a flickering of silent images  
to which anyone can write the script.  
(Truant State, 65)*

In the shift from modernism to postmodernism, which is providing the framework of our current reading of Hasluck's work, a significant issue which is constantly foregrounded is the relationship between literature and history. It is not surprising then that one of the key concerns Hasluck-the-writer problematises, or interrogates, throughout his novels is the relationship of fiction and history. The discourse of history, due to its narrative nature, has a close relationship with the discourse of literature. In the modernist paradigm, however, the constructs of history and literature are divided into two distinct, autonomous disciplines, in which the story told by historiography is supposedly based on facts while the story of the novel is always decidedly fictional. The modernist's concept of history as "non-fiction" depends upon a Western dialectic which adheres to the seamless wholeness of the story or meta-narrative; accepts as unproblematic the notion of an authentic past in the present; and presupposes as fact the division it sees between universal truth and fiction (or, more generally, between life and art). However, the modernist separation of literature and history is a relatively recent phenomenon, for, maintains Hutcheon, in pre-modernist times history and literature were seen as branches of the same tree.

Postmodernism, then, can be seen as reinscribing aspects of the pre-modernist view, bringing history and literature back together again, for the postmodern transgresses the modernist conventions of historiography by conflating the historical and the discursive. Hutcheon explains that, whereas in modernism, historical statements,

be they in historiography or realist fiction, tend to suppress grammatical reference to the discursive situation of the utterance (producer, receiver, context, intent) in their attempt to narrate past events in such a way that the events seem to narrate themselves. . . . In the postmodern writing of history – and fiction . . . there is a deliberate contamination of the historical with didactic and situational discursive elements, thereby challenging the implied assumptions of historical statements: objectivity, neutrality, impersonality, and transparency of representation.

What fades away with this kind of contesting is any sure ground upon which to base representation and narration, in either historiography or fiction. In most postmodern work, however, that ground is first inscribed and subsequently subverted . . . . (91-92)

The inscription and subsequent subversion of official histories can be seen in the work of writers such as Salman Rushdie and Gabriel Garcia Marquez, who write about the historical events of India and South America respectively. The record of the official histories has become, Hutcheon maintains, “a text, a discursive construct upon which fiction draws as easily as it does upon other texts of literature” (142). Postmodernism highlights the similarities between the textual nature of history and fiction, and, claims Hutcheon, “deliberately confuses the notion that history’s problem is verification, while fiction’s is veracity” (112).<sup>28</sup>

### **Historiographic Metafiction**

Hutcheon calls the postmodern device which problematises and reconnects the constructs of history and fiction “historiographic metafiction.” Historiographic metafiction, she claims, is a significant characteristic of postmodern novels, which operates by refuting

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<sup>28</sup> Similar to the verisimilitude and antiverisimilitude characteristic of the mystery-thriller, the challenging of history through literature is possible because both literature and history have been seen “to derive their force more from verisimilitude than from any objective truth; they are both identified as linguistic constructs, highly conventionalised in their narrative forms, and not at all transparent either in terms of language or structure; and they appear to be equally intertextual, deploying the texts of the past in their own complex textuality” (Hutcheon, 105).

the natural or common-sense methods of distinguishing between historical fact and fiction. It refuses the view that only history has a truth claim, both by questioning the ground of that claim in historiography and by asserting that both history and fiction are discourses, human constructs, signifying systems, and both derive their major claim to truth from that identity. (Hutcheon, 93)

By breaking down the distinction between fiction and non-fiction, or between art and life, the postmodern challenges and problematises the distinction between literary fiction and historical reality, calling the dialectic into question, but not overthrowing it.

History is not made obsolete: it is, however, being rethought – as a human construct. And in arguing that *history* does not exist except as text, it does not stupidly and ‘gleefully’ deny that the *past* existed, but only that its accessibility to us now is entirely conditioned by textuality. (Hutcheon, 16)

History remains, although the validity of its claims are problematised through the limits and means of its production.

Historiographic metafiction, then, as a postmodern device, shows that the past can only be represented through discourse, and so our access to the past is limited and controlled by the nature and function of those discourses. Thus historiographic metafiction makes problematic

both the denial and the assertion of reference. It blurs the distinction which Richard Rorty . . . makes between ‘texts’ and ‘lumps’ – things made and things found, the domains of interpretation and epistemology. It suggests that there were lumps – historical personages and events – but that we know them only as texts today. (Hutcheon, 145)

History is available in the present only as textual remains, or as fragments of texts known as intertexts.

We cannot know the past except through its texts: its documents, its evidence, even its eye-witness accounts are *texts*. Even the institutions of

the past, its social structures and practices, could be seen, in one sense, as social texts. (Hutcheon, 16)

Intertexts are second-hand, borrowed accounts loaded with interpretations and are not singular, coherent, and complete records of antecedent events. To postmodernism, an historical intertext is “the presence of the past” and “not a nostalgic return; it is a critical revisiting, and ironic dialogue with the past of both art and society . . .” (Hutcheon, 4). The fragmentary texts of history, like art, can be formed into different readings through varying frameworks with contrasting processes of selection and emphasis. The attempt to unify history and present it as an authentic portrayal of the past through realism is challenged by the postmodern. The challenge comes through postmodern writers first inscribing the “realism” of history, and then problematising it through such devices as parody or multiple readings. It is the postmodern act of inscribing of the past as “real,” through a narrative constructed out of multiple readings of fragmentary texts, which makes history no different from art

Moreover, the postmodern novel characterised by historiographic metafiction not only challenges the narrative constructions of history, but also exposes the attempt to stabilise the subject within and of history, for in the postmodern “the subject is viewed as a process and as a site of contradiction” (Hutcheon, 167). In the action of conflating the historical “facts” with the fictional “story,” the postmodern novel undermines the modernist assumption of a universal, trans-historical

humanist notion of Man as a coherent and continuous subject. Like poststructuralist feminist theory and recent historiography, this fiction investigates how, in all these discourses, the subject of history is the subject in history, subject to history and to his story. (Hutcheon, 177)

Historiographic metafiction subverts subjectivity in two major ways: on the one hand, through the self-aware, intrusive manipulative narrator, and, on the other, through multiple voices which tell numerous histories of single events, often from a variety of contradictory view points which undermine each other. Both these devices destroy the notion of a single, unified subject.

However, a paradox remains, for although historiographic metafiction emphasises a disruptive self-awareness and multiple subjectivities which introduce diversity and difference, it still incorporates a universalism that is inherently a modernist preoccupation. The incongruity lies in the process of the postmodern being derived as a reaction to the modern, for the postmodern must first inscribe an entity before it can subvert it. Thus the very structures historiographic metafiction challenges must initially be endorsed to some measure, and the subsequent challenge to them does not entirely overturn, nor replace, them. This paradox leads Hutcheon to describe historiographic metafiction as “teasing” us with the real past, for all attempts to connect with that “reality” are of necessity mediated through “the structures of our various discourses about it” (146). The confrontation, however, does not lead to a new dialectic or binary position:

There is no dialectic in the postmodern: the self-reflexive remains distinct from its traditionally accepted contrary – the historico-political context in which it is embedded. The result of this deliberate refusal to resolve contradictions is a contesting of . . . the totalising master narratives of our culture . . . . (Hutcheon, x)

Historiographic metafiction’s openness to both sides of the dialectic (the universalising meta-narratives and the particular, multiple self-reflexive narratives) means that contradiction remains inevitable.

Ultimately, it is the absurdity of postmodernism’s unresolved paradoxes which allows historiographic metafiction to remain committed to an anti-universalist stance. Furthermore, historiographic metafiction’s apparent awareness of its own entanglement with, and, therefore, its own limits within, discourse, allow it to parody its own complicity. It is fitting, then, that the movement from modernism to postmodernism, and, especially, the displacement from the privileging of history as real to historiographic metafiction, provides the framework for the exploration of Hasluck’s novels.

In most of the critical work on postmodernism, it is narrative – be it in literature, history, or theory – that has usually been the major focus of attention. Historiographic metafiction incorporates all three of these

domains: that is, its theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs (historiographic metafiction) is made the grounds for its rethinking and reworking of the forms and contents of the past.

(Hutcheon, 5)

Hasluck's novels are concerned with issues of literature, history and theory. In this next section, *Quarantine*, *The Bellarmine Jug*, and *Truant State*, are explored in relation to history and literature, while in the two chapters which follow, the theoretical concerns of a number of Hasluck's novels, especially his last three, will be elaborated.

### **The Politics of Change**

As argued earlier, Hasluck's work demonstrates Lyotard's model of modern literary theory whereby the postmodern is to be found as a reaction within the modern.<sup>29</sup> Hasluck's very early work is decidedly modernist yet, at the same time, problematises history in a postmodern way. In Hasluck's later work, there is a move to a more postmodern framework, and historiographic metafiction becomes a significant feature as the boundaries between literature and history are conflated and reinterpreted. The wholeness of the subject is questioned when the institutions of literature itself are undermined at the conclusion of both *The Bellarmine Jug* and *Truant State*, for the intrusive, self-aware narrators throw both novels' carefully developed histories into doubt as well as the literary nature of the texts themselves. Although the importance of literature and history is inscribed in these works, no centring remains intact, all subject positions are shown to be provisional, open-ended, and often contradictory.

Another reason for reading these novels of Hasluck as historiographic metafiction has also been indicated in Chapter One, for the novels are difficult to place generically, sitting awkwardly between the genres of the thriller and of history. Through the postmodern paradigm, however, they can be read as self-critical pantomimes of genre itself. The postmodern

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<sup>29</sup> See Chapter Four.



scrutinises institutions, transgresses previously accepted limits, makes the borders between literary genres fluid so conventions of genres are not unproblematically merged but play off against each other. (Hutcheon, 9)

Perhaps some of the “awkwardness” in reading Hasluck’s novels is due to the thriller being a popular “low art” form, while the historical novel is a more elitist “high art” form. The mixing of generic types and of high and low art forms is a postmodern practice.

One of the contradictions of postmodernism . . . is that it does indeed “close the gap” . . . between high and low art forms, and it does so through the ironising of both. . . . Postmodernism is both academic and popular, elitist and accessible. (Hutcheon, 44)

Such parody is characteristic of the postmodern, though it is certainly not exclusive to it. The postmodern takes this task of problematising values, conventions and institutions in literature and history very seriously, for in doing so it develops a political edge that opens the possibility of generating change.

Some theorists, however, such as Jurgen Habermas, would argue that postmodernism’s problematising of all habitual constructs leads to political inertia and an inability to speak from a constructive position. Hutcheon does not entirely agree, but asserts that postmodernism “has little faith in art’s ability to change society *directly*, though it does believe that questioning and problematising may set up the conditions for possible change” (218). What is important in postmodernism’s problematising is the questions asked, rather than the answers given. Salman Rushdie, a significant writer of historiographic metafiction, puts a strong case for the political nature of the postmodern novel when he claims that

description is itself a political act. . . . It is clear that redescribing a world is the necessary first step towards changing it. And particularly at times when the State takes reality into its own hands, and sets about distorting it, altering the past to fit its present needs, then the masking of the alternative realities of art, including the novel of memory, becomes politicised. . . .

Writers and politicians are natural rivals. Both groups try to make the world in their own images; they fight for the same territory. And the novel

is one way of denying the official, politician's version of the truth.

("Imaginary Homelands," 14)

In this sense Hasluck's novels are political novels, which can be seen as dissident acts of resistance to the dominant historical narrations told in Australia and elsewhere in the Western world.

Indeed, Hasluck-the-critic advocates political change in a similar fashion to Hutcheon and Rushdie. However, whereas Hutcheon and Rushdie recognise that such change is made possible by the postmodern perceptions raised through historiographic metafiction, for Hasluck the changes are more from a modernist perspective of being true to one's self. Nevertheless, each critic agrees that change through literary endeavour happens incrementally in the rereading of historical moments. The role of the novelist as an agent in political change, claims Hasluck, is often to show how small moments of history can be great ones, and how apparently insignificant moments of dissidence and resistance can be harbingers of momentous change:

There is a need for such voices in Australia at the present time – the voice of humane scepticism that isn't necessarily swept along by the so-called spirit of the times; the dissident voice which is prepared to stand still now and again and work out whether what is going on is a great moment or a small one; the voice that refrains from joining the vociferous ovations for ideas which many in the cheering crowd are not quite sure about and only half-believe in; the voice that is prepared to look closely at the seductive postulates of the new sophistry known as political correctness; the voice that is true to itself. ("The Archduke," 41)

Hasluck's work excels at such play, for a theme within all of Hasluck's texts is a questioning of the nature of power in relation to discourse, especially within the discourses of literature and history. These overarching paradigms are constantly questioned in the dialogue and events of the texts. Even in his earliest modernist novel, in which the single narrative voice speaks for all humankind, the shadow of the postmodern and historiographic metafiction is present in the openended questioning of the issues raised.

## ***Quarantine***

*Quarantine* explores, within an individual, expansive, narrative voice, the nature of community, the character of political power, the function of truth and lies, and the reactions of “civilised” people to threatening issues of race and disease. However, with a postmodern twist to be found in many modernist texts, the narrator’s voice apparently is not entirely in control, or altogether confident, for in *Quarantine* the narrator is constantly reorganising his telling of the histories he constructs from the memories of the past.

For example, the narrator admits telling different versions of “his night of temptation” (143). These narrations of a humorous misunderstanding are tailored for different responses from different audiences. Similarly, a fellow passenger constantly sorts through and rearranges his past which he has collected in pictures, newspaper articles and clippings. The collage he builds of his life is constantly changing, and with it he changes the story he recounts to those interested enough to gather around him. The process of reordering is alluded to by the narrator when he states that “the truth may be arrived at not merely by a study of the so-called facts but from the very process of narration. Often, the kind of lies a man tells reveals as much truth as a technical statement of what he saw or did” (43). Lies abound through the events of the quarantine, and in many ways it is truth itself which is quarantined. To Burgess, who represents the arrogant Englishman abroad, lying was “serious business; something you saved up for important moments and used only when it was absolutely necessary to deceive” (109). But to Shewfik, the Egyptian owner of the Quarantine Station, lying to please was “no more than an elementary courtesy; one of the duties incidental to his management of the concession . . .” (109). To the Australian and English passengers, with their typical orientalist outlook, Shewfik’s duplicitous behaviour appears to be that of a madman.

The motif of the madman also appears persistently throughout *Quarantine*. It can be argued that it is a metaphor for the “postmodern” dilemma faced by modernist

writing, for what is impossible to hold together, or to possess, is the whole story, or history, of the quarantine (188). This is the anomaly which breaks out as a plague. The narrator demonstrates this when he confesses that,

although many years have passed, the memory of the affair sets up an itch in my mind which wants scratching. The anomalies, the gaps in my understanding of what happened, the half truths – the memory begins to fester; it begins to trouble me like some blemish of the skin, some residual disaffection which comes and goes but never heals. (3)

Similarly, though using a different metaphor, Salman Rushdie, in “Imaginary Homelands,” sees memories of the past as a broken mirror in which some fragments are irrecoverably lost. Memory and the past are forever fragmented, having a never-to-be-retrieved wholeness, as highlighted by the postmodern. However, with modernist flair, similar to Hasluck in *Quarantine*, Rushdie claims that “the past is a country from which we have all emigrated,” and so, therefore, “its loss is part of our common humanity” (12). Rushdie expounds his thesis by stating that the looking to a nostalgic past becomes “a subject of universal significance and appeal” (12). So the issues of memory are universal, and a part of a modernist framework, but with postmodern complexity, as Rushdie’s work shows, the wholeness of all memories is problematised by the multiplicity of contexts in which the memories are recalled.

Thus the retelling of the story is also a kind of madness which, in *Quarantine*, the small community tries to protect itself against by setting up a committee to order its affairs. But the committee itself becomes a madness as it votes to censure, and place under house arrest, the innocent victim, David Shears. To Burgess and the narrator, whose Western concepts of the law depend on “speaking the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth,” the lies of Shewfik and the contradictory narratives of Dr Magro are irrelevant and immaterial to democratic processes of the law. However, the multiple stories told by the narrator, and the blindness of Burgess to his autocratic control of information, illustrate the duplicitous nature of all the different narratives and proceedings at the quarantine station.

The visible processes of the law, enacted through the discipline of structures such as meetings and quorums, become equated with the processes of truth. The narrator recalls the protests he made at the time – that he was only a student and therefore the wrong person to appoint as a judge. But he was not listened to by the committee. Instead, he recollects,

[t]hey ignored my plea entirely. They were determined to have a Judge and, in retrospect, I can see that it was of no great concern to them who he was or what he did. My importance was simply this. It eased their consciences to be able to elect a man who was reputed to have some association with the law. Nothing more. (15)

To Shewfik, the Egyptian host, the English-style meeting with its motions, chairpersons, and counting of hands is a kind of sickness. He knows that the law, like the narrative, is not bound by a fixed framework of truth as the Europeans believe, nor is it by nature amenable to the democratic process. On the contrary, both the law and narrative have a tendency, on the one hand, to submit to a dominating voice, a narrative autocracy, yet on the other hand, to adapt to their context, like the chameleon. The notions of Shewfik, then, call into question any hegemonic claims made by the law or literature to having a presentation of absolute truth.

Therefore, in *Quarantine*, the narrator's inability to grasp the whole picture, his unawareness of the different cultural constructs, his failure to harmonise the multiple narrations of single events, and his desire to acquit himself of accusations of murder through a reconstruction of the history of the quarantine, reveal the broken mirror of memory. The fragmentation destroys the expectations of being able to find the truth, to recall history accurately and to solve the mystery of the murder. While these elements of slippage, both in the telling of history and the conventions of the genre are postmodern elements in this modernist novel, the histories are still personal to the narrator and his companions at the quarantine, and, because they are not officially recognised histories, *Quarantine* does not explore the issues raised by the conflation of "real" history and fiction through the medium of historiographic metafiction. The presence of the play on history and

literature in *Quarantine*, however, is a precursor to the issues raised in a more pronounced way in Hasluck's later work.

### ***The Bellarmine Jug***

In contrast to *Quarantine*, Hasluck's fourth novel, *The Bellarmine Jug*, is steeped in historiographic metafiction, for it plunges deeply into the problems of public histories and literature through both serious and playful parody. The narrative of *The Bellarmine Jug* employs a mix of historical textual fragments drawn from an elaborate array of intertexts which includes official recordings and fabricated historical fictions. The complex nature of rearticulating histories is demonstrated through Hasluck-the-writer's retelling of a part of Western Australia's history within a complex web of international events which are entwined with the histories of other nations. As I have argued elsewhere, *The Bellarmine Jug*, like *Quarantine*, is also a novel about memory, for through the reconstruction of remembered events, both individual and official, the cherished histories of the past are exposed.<sup>30</sup> Although these memories are a mix of formally documented events and fictional creations, they are all "texts" from which the novel shapes its historical narrative. Through an open and forthright critique of the speculative nature of the documents and events of the novel, Hasluck-the-writer makes the reader well aware of the novel's own implication in the processes of retelling history.

Like *Quarantine*, *The Bellarmine Jug* is constructed as a lawyer's case, seeking to piece together a convincing story for the reader-jury. The narrator in *Quarantine* is writing to a colleague to justify his inaction in the past, and he is trying to convince the reader of the truth of his narrative, even if he realises its shifting nature. In *The Bellarmine Jug*, the narrator is also a middle-aged academic, writing to convince the reader of the reasonableness of his actions as a student. However, in *The Bellarmine Jug*, it is revealed that Leon, the narrator and protagonist, has not

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<sup>30</sup> See my unpublished Master's thesis, *For the Term of Its National Life: The Australian (Imagi)Nation*.

written the novel alone, but has drafted it with a group of fellow lawyers to honour a lecturer, and to practically demonstrate how well he had instructed them about the narrative nature of the law. At the end of the novel Leon's confession ensures that the reader is in no doubt about its fictionality. Leon confesses to the lecturer:

'My fellow authors and I admit to some exaggeration. . . . Young Grotius is not the only piece of fiction. Walter Chapman is heavily disguised. Although I must say that there is some resemblance between our creation and the man who was Sir Peter Odger's Associate in 1948.' 'Reflections of reality or not,' the lecturer murmured. 'Many of the participants have been given some very good lines.' (257)

Then, somewhat melodramatically, Leon continues:

'Your former students have conspired against you to control the past. Your fate is in our hands. We can turn you into a legend or defame you. With the stroke of a pen ' (257)

The novel again acknowledges its fictional nature when Leon admits that much is speculation.

'Conjecture. The cause of Sanwar's death remains a mystery. We are forcing you to speculate. We are merely serving up to you the kind of thing you served up to us so many years ago. Perhaps we were well taught; vindicating the Institute's proud claim to examine its students at a deeper level.' (258)

Ironically, the lecturer, in praise of their efforts, contemplates whether the contents of the novel could be used in the law school as inspiration for mock trials, alongside Watergate and other historic cases. At the end of the epilogue the lecturer concludes:

'I have your manuscript. I accept your *Festschrift*, not as a curse but as a blessing, a gift from those who have not merely observed the dereliction of my mind but have sufficient affection for me to re-arrange the furniture and leave behind an exotic bloom. I shall treasure your work.' (260)

Thus, in a mixed metaphor, the narrative nature of the historical account of the events at the Institute is equated to art, an exotic bloom, to be admired and treasured. The reader, of course, realises that the novel is even more fictional than

Leon, the narrator, admits, but what is perhaps less obvious is the orthodox historical texts the novel draws on, and the serious, parodic historical speculation the text engages in.

Ken Gelder and Paul Salzman, in *The New Diversity*, maintain that “Hasluck’s fiction is also metafiction, a speculation about its own fictional processes; his work, as well, seeks to fictionalise history, attempting to break down the barriers between the two discourses” (137). Gelder and Salzman categorise *The Bellarmine Jug* as “speculative fiction,” because it explores a historical gap. Pelsaert’s actual journals, with their account of the foundering of the *Batavia* and the subsequent mutiny, leave many gaps which are part of those historical spaces which *The Bellarmine Jug* seeks to close by melding “real” histories with fictional texts. One source Hasluck-the-writer draws on is Henrietta Drake-Brockman’s publication on Pelsaert, *Voyage to Disaster*, which is a serious historiographic attempt to cover the historical gaps concerning the *Batavia*’s ill-fated voyage. Drake-Brockman, who published the first complete English translation of Pelsaert’s journals, claims that the Dutchman was neglected in his home country as well as in Australia, for, she writes in 1963, the “name of Francisco Pelsaert is written on the map of the world, yet is little known in Holland” (3). So the history of Pelsaert and the *Batavia* mutiny has been neglected by historians.

*The Bellarmine Jug*, then, can be seen partly to address the dearth of interest in Australia’s memory of this gruesome tale. In the novel, the playful conjunction of history and speculative fiction appears in the retelling not only of the histories of Pelsaert and the mutineers, but also in the narration of the histories of the Rosicrucians; the Indonesian independence struggle; the development of international law; the Petrov affair; and the chilling Cold War scandal involving Burgess and McLean. The texts and the fragments of texts, drawn on and developed, problematise both the official and the fictional narrations of the same events. “The past is there to be explored, embellished, and reconstituted, but in a way which will constantly bear upon the preoccupations of one’s current situation,” writes Hasluck-the-critic in “The Past’s Deceitful Dream” (78). Such speculative



retelling of history, then, is not entirely innocent, but rather is a playfully seditious act against the monologic telling of official histories by orthodox historians. Historiographic metafiction challenges the modernist paradigm of linear histories, both local and universal, with their beginning, middle and conclusive endings.

The memories in *The Bellarmine Jug*, both from official and speculative sources, are largely reconstructed around the years 1629 and 1948. The events and depravities of the *Batavia* mutiny of 1629 have been long-forgotten, or suppressed, by the Dutch, though in Australia and Indonesia some are still beguiled by their horror and mystery. In 1948, the fictional characters of Dr Sanwar, an Indonesian academic who is heavily involved in the Indonesian independence struggle, and Martin Aveling, a law student from Australia, are drawn together in an intrigue centred around the equally fictitious Grotius Institute in the Hague. They allege that secret, fragmentary records of the *Batavia* atrocities are kept in the Institute's library. These speculative, or imaginary, "texts" are drawn on, and even quoted, as part of the historical narrative of *The Bellarmine Jug*.

In *The Bellarmine Jug*, then, the historical gap concerning Pelsaert's journal is theoretically filled through the speculative history told in the fictional appendix to Pelsaert's journal. The document, supposedly written by Pelsaert in Batavia, the capital of the Dutch East Indies, recounts the aftermath of the *Batavia* disaster on the Western Australian coast in 1629. Intriguingly, Drake-Brockman's historiography, which attempts to tell the "true" historical tale, has ten appendices attached to it, and she, too, acknowledges the uncertain, mysterious nature of the Pelsaert journals:

Research has shown that the true character and stature of Francisco Pelsaert can only be assessed from his own record of the events in India and at the Abrolhos in which he played a part. For more than three centuries he has remained a dubious figure hovering in the shadowy fringes of Dutch and early Australian history, the existence of his writing scarcely known.

Drake-Brockman mentions additional journal statements which may be from the pen of Pelsaert, but which differ in detail from the journal she includes in her book (68). The blurred distinctions between history and fiction are highlighted in *The Bellarmine Jug* through a few characters, such as Aveling, who believe the authenticity of the speculative, secret appendix of Pelsaert's journal, while some, like the Warden of the Grotius Institute, Van Riebeck, believe it is a hoax. Others do not make clear what they really believe, but use the existence of the appendix to pursue their own ends.

The difference between the speculative fiction of the secret appendices in the Grotius Institute's library and the orthodox record of Pelsaert's journals published in Drake-Brockman's *Voyage to Disaster* is that the speculative appendix alleges Hugo Grotius,<sup>31</sup> the son of the founder of the Grotius Institute, was one of the main conspirators in the mutiny on the *Batavia*, and in the atrocities committed on the Abrolhos Islands, in which over 120 people were murdered. The appendix reveals that Hugo Grotius Jr., whose name Pelsaert expunged from the main body of his journal, was punished, along with two other mutineers, by being cast ashore on the coast of Western Australia at Wittecarra Creek. The creek and the Red Cliffs mentioned in *The Bellarmine Jug* are actual places named on Drake-Brockman's map (296), and the two other mutineers, Jan Pelgrom de Bye and Wouter Loos, are officially believed to have been marooned on the mainland (229-30). The reason given in the speculative appendix for Hugo Grotius Jr.'s involvement in the mutiny was his desire to be a part of a conspiracy to establish a new constitution, and a new nation, through allegiance to a new religious order – Rosicrucianism.

The allegation that the conspirators on the *Batavia* were Rosicrucians is an example of the complex intertexts operating in *The Bellarmine Jug*.<sup>32</sup> This claim has some

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<sup>31</sup> Hereafter referred to as Hugo Grotius Jr. to differentiate him from his father who has the same name.

<sup>32</sup> Randolph Stow also refers to the connection between the mutineers and the Rosicrucians in "The Southland of Antichrist: The *Batavia* Disaster of 1629" (quoted by Kieran Dolin in "Legal Fictions," 54).

credence in orthodox histories, for Drake-Brockman links the chief mutineer, Jeronimus Cornelisz, to Torrentius van der Beecke, a notorious artist and pedlar of strange religions.<sup>33</sup> Among the turbulent events of his life, Drake-Brockman claims:

Torrentius van der Beecke was also accused of trying to establish in Holland the creed of the Meritorious Order of the Rosy Cross, or the Rosicrucians. . . .

Such then, were the beliefs that Jeronimus Cornelisz preached to his own followers on the forlorn isles west of the unknown Southland, a convenient dogma that enabled him to murder and steal without scruple. There his nimble mind and glib tongue, doubtless aided by his much better education, enabled him to gain a fantastic hold on the less vivid imaginations of those he chose to influence. (75)

Hasluck-the-writer takes this textual “fact,” which is a minor point in the orthodox histories, and makes it pivotal to his text, for it is in these historical gaps, these fissures of the unknown, that he develops his speculative history.

The historical narrative told of the Rosicrucians is that they were a secret society which sprang into prominence through a hoax in the early seventeenth-century. Thus the emergence of Rosicrucianism was itself built on a fiction. Christopher McIntosh, in a comprehensive study, *The Rosicrucians: The History, Mythology and Rituals of an Occult Order*, states that the Rosicrucian mythology “was, so to speak, deliberately ‘launched’ with great suddenness on its strange course through history” (18). The Order began in 1614 with the publication of a German text, the title of which can be translated as *The Declaration of the Worthy Order of the Rosy Cross*. Ironically, this fictional text became the “authoritative,” originatory text for a number of publications which legitimised other secret societies as well.

McIntosh claims one reason for the durability of the Rosicrucian secret society was the appealing symbolism of its motif, the Rose Cross. The Rose Cross has both an

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<sup>33</sup> It should be noted that even in Pelsaert’s actual journals Jeronimus remains an ambiguous character, and truth and fiction in the multiple fragments and narratives in his “original” text is impossible to distinguish.

aesthetic and a religious attraction: its aesthetic attraction being the rose; its religious element being the cross, the cardinal symbol of Christianity. At the time of the publication of these extraordinary hoaxes, Germany was gripped by the build-up to the Thirty Years' War, which lasted from 1618 to 1648. This last of the great European religious wars devastated Germany and left it destitute, an open target for utopian visions of future hope. While the war was originally between the Catholic and the Lutheran churches, it spread to include the Calvinists who sought to gain an equal footing with Catholicism and Lutheranism. The Netherlands was a stronghold of Calvinism, and the historical Hugo Grotius, although a moderate, included himself in their number.

The official historical fragments about Hugo Grotius (1583-1645) describe him as a Dutch lawyer, theologian, statesman and poet, who, today, is still considered in legal circles to be the father of international law. It was his arguments which allowed the Dutch imperialists of the "Golden Age" of the Netherlands to treat the open seas as their own God-given domain. The importance of this is alluded to by the Warden in *The Bellarmine Jug* when he states that in "1609 Grotius proclaimed a famous doctrine, the freedom of the seas. That doctrine became a means whereby the Dutch East India Company broke the monopolies in the East of Spain and Portugal" (51). Whereas Spain and Portugal were Roman Catholic in religious orientation, Grotius was a Protestant theologian. The speculative Pelsaert manuscripts, then, presented a threat to the integrity of the official history of the Dutch Golden Age, to the legitimacy of their power on the high seas and their conquest of the colonies of other European powers. If the Roman Catholic nations such as Spain and Portugal could discredit the person of Hugo Grotius, the whole of his doctrine supporting the expansionism of the Protestant Dutch would fall into disrepute. As the seventeenth-century was the time when international relations, and the laws governing them, were being codified into the present Western system, the manuscripts also posed a threat to the whole foundation of Western international law.

Theoretically, therefore, as Hasluck-the-writer speculates, it is not beyond reason that Grotius's son should become involved in a heretical secret society which McIntosh claims "was initially ultra-Protestant" (20), and that his eminent, Calvinist father should seek to disown him because of his violent and dissident aspirations. Ironically, in the speculative history of *The Bellarmine Jug*, the son of the "father of international law" flouts those laws in the face of the Dutch imperialists, in much the same way as the Dutch used the same laws to master the inhabitants of the Spice Isles. The Dutch, of course, responded by excising Hugo Grotius Jr. and his band of followers out of the memory of the living into historical oblivion.

For Hasluck-the-writer, then, the unrestrained fantasies and the utopian prophecies of the Rosicrucian brotherhood, and the proclamation of the freedom of the seas to aid imperialistic European expansion, are just the right mix to fill a historical gap in the Pelsaert records. Hugo Grotius Jr. and his band of disillusioned mutineers are constructed as a local group of Rosicrucians who seek to create a new world and a new nation in the vicinity of Australia. They are appropriating the triumphalist narrative of Europe and the Netherlands in its Golden Age, and are establishing their "new world order" through mutiny and cold-blooded murder. They use the symbol of the Rose Cross as an emblem of their collusion to implement the insurrection and, significantly, they inscribe it over the picture of Cardinal Bellarmine on the Bellarmine jugs.

Cardinal Bellarmine (1542-1621), as an historical figure constructed from textual fragments, was an Italian Jesuit theologian, a key figure in the defence of the rights of the Roman Catholic Church against the absolutism of kings and against the advance of Protestantism. Cardinal Bellarmine was canonised in 1930.<sup>34</sup> As a metaphor of reinscription in *The Bellarmine Jug*, the Rose Cross of the Rosicrucians is painted over the rival emblem of Cardinal Bellarmine, an "authentic" historical character portrayed on the jugs which bear his name.

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<sup>34</sup> See Marvin O'Connell's article on "Saint Robert Francis Romulus Bellarmine" in the *World Book Encyclopedia*.

Furthermore, the narrator takes the significance and power of the symbol of the Rose Cross, and through the horror of a bloody mutiny and the menace of a new, potentially dangerous, society adjacent to the Netherlands' distant colonies, threatens the power and wholeness of the orthodox European historical narrative. Additionally, the powerful, dissident European symbol of the Rose Cross becomes a weapon appropriated by certain radicals in the Indonesian independence campaign against the Dutch.

According to Niesmann, the librarian at the Grotius Institute, the Rose Cross was first taken to Eastern Java by Nestorian missionaries in the seventh-century, before the advent of Islam. The fictional Niesmann, who pieces together the mix of historical and speculative fragments about the Rose Cross and the *Batavia* incidents, claims that Christian Rosenkreuz, in the fourteenth-century, had brought the Rose Cross back to Europe from Arabia, where it had acquired a heretical mix of Christianity and Eastern mysticism.<sup>35</sup> After being used in turn by the Nestorian missionaries, Christian Rosenkreuz, and the *Batavia* mutineers, the Rose Cross, in *The Bellarmine Jug*, was taken back to East Java through a deliberately altered copy of the speculative Pelsaert manuscript. Thus the use of the doctored appendix was the third occasion the Rose Cross was taken to Indonesia, and it was a move designed both to resist the Dutch and disrupt the fledgling independence movement under Sukarno. Niesmann states that

this world has been crisscrossed by journeys and migrations that you and I can hardly dream of. Ideas float on timeless currents, they travel through subterranean channels and on overgrown tracks. They are taken up, embraced, discarded, and taken up again. They never cease to exist. The scholar hears the ceaseless hum of pollination. (145)

The cross-pollination in *The Bellarmine Jug* is significant in that the mythologies of the West have been three times transported to the East, and three times returned, each of the exchanges acting as intertexts to change and further transform the Western narrative. So, "far from importing a gospel to the new world," Niesmann

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<sup>35</sup> Another Australian novelist, David Foster, has written a postmodern parody on Rosenkreuz and the Rose Cross, *The Adventures of Christian Rosy Cross*. Foster's novel, too, is a clever "heretical mix," in terms of religious, scientific and literary conventions.

states, "Jeronimus and his mutineers were carrying back the bastard offspring of a creed which had already been exported to the old" (145). It is this complex interaction of reinscribing, using and abusing texts and intertexts which shows historiographic metafiction at work in *The Bellarmine Jug*. The symbol of the Rose Cross is used in a postmodern way, as the mutineers seize it for their own advantage, wielding it as a powerful symbol to challenge the might, the reputation, and the religious dogmas of the greatest economic and naval power of the world in 1629.

But the speculative, fictional history continues. After the *Batavia* mutiny has failed, the defiance of the Rose Cross continues on a barren stretch of the Western Australian coastline. The exiles, marooned as punishment for their role in the mutiny, sculpture the image of the Rose Cross into the red cliffs of Wittecarra Creek, and scatter a number of the modified Bellarmine jugs at its base. The cliffs and the jugs are discovered by Indonesian fishermen, and some of the jugs are carried back to Eastern Java, where a strong mythology of Messianic cults teach of the coming of Ratu Adil (the Great One). The stories the fishermen bring back from the south, of a people who had risen up against their Dutch masters, stir the Javanese imagination with the promise of a mythical light-skinned deliverer. In the speculative fiction of the novel, Dr Melik Sanwar, an imaginary Indonesian freedom-fighter and an expert in East Javanese mythology, uses these myths and the re-appearance of the Nestorian symbol of the Rose Cross to stir up Indonesian nationalism. The mutineers' rebellion against Dutch authority becomes an arousing symbol for the PKI's (the Indonesian Communist Party of the 1940s to 1960s) own resistance to the Dutch, their colonial masters.

Dr Sanwar, an expert in Indonesian history and mythology, is a past student of the Grotius Institute. He has been taught well, for the former student returns to haunt, and nearly destroy, the Institute. Dr Sanwar is the Director of the Surabaya Museum in East Java, an expert on the myths of the Malaccan archipelago, and he is well aware of the presence of the Rose Cross of the Rosicrucians at Wittecarra Creek on the West Australian coast. Niesmann, the librarian, illegally gives him

the original copy of Pelsaert's appendix to help in his research in the 1920s, but the Dutch arrest the hapless Dr Sanwar and the document disappears. Thus the original, pure, orthodox manuscript (which is a speculative creation of Hasluck-the-writer) is lost. Niesmann alerts Van Riebeck to his grave breach of trust, and the second manuscript, which Niesmann copied from the original, is kept under wraps to protect the librarian. Then, in 1948, Dr Sanwar reappears with Martin Aveling to ask Niesmann to make a translation of the appendix for the Australian. Dr Sanwar also asks Niesmann to make a few changes to the text, in order to enhance the myth for the benefit of the Indonesian Independence Movement. So, not only is the original document lost, but the copy of the speculative Pelsaert journal is translated and replaced with a deliberately compromised account. Thus speculative fiction, sanctioned histories, conflicting national ideologies and mythologies, heresy and orthodoxy are intermixed with postmodern zest in the dry parchments of the Pelsaert journal.

Consequently, through his own retelling of history, Hasluck-the-writer interrogates the process of enunciating official and fictional histories, either personalised academic histories or the narrations of nationhood. The whole process is caught up in the production of stories which challenge other narrations of the same events, contesting the relations of power between different narrations which seek to control, destabilise or expose the production of meaning from those documents and the circumstances they describe. As a novel clearly concerned with issues of historiographic metafiction, *The Bellarmine Jug* also makes powerful political statements about the West and the power of narrative in its unquestioned drive for domination and control. Similarly, Hasluck's next novel, *Truant State*, raises political questions, but with a more regional focus. As with *The Bellarmine Jug*, its main concern is about multiple histories, the play of memory and the retelling of the past.



## ***Truant State***

In *Truant State*, Hasluck's fifth novel, history is described through the recurrent metaphor of the attic. Memories, as dusty heirlooms, are also "texts" which are reminders of a distant past, each heirloom having its own long-forgotten, personalised interpretation, which is distinctly different for each person who remembers. Hasluck's metaphor of the heirloom displays many of the characteristics of Hutcheon's postmodern construction of historiographic metafiction. The following passage is quoted at length to give the reader a sense of how fully the text in *Truant State* mirrors the concept of historiographic metafiction. This mirroring can be seen in the highlighting and problematising of both language and history – language through the slippage of powerful word-concepts and the illusive nature of the images of the metaphor, and history through the fragments of historical texts and memories. The narrator philosophises:

Heirlooms.

That ghostly word.

Syllables which seem to float, and linger.

You can almost feel the cobwebs, touch the dust.

Something handed down. Yours, but not quite yours. Always in the half light, that slight withholding of approval.

Bric-a-brac? Junk? More problems to be disposed of? Or could it be, could it happen, that somewhere amongst those chattels, ornaments, curios, weapons, diaries, letters, there might be . . . well, if not something rare and lustrous, then, at least, a vital clue? An explanation?

The possibilities begin to multiply. The words and sentences and paragraphs gradually expand. The cloth upon those dusty syllables, the unfinished, cobwebbed cloth, is shaken down; unfolded. Until, at last, in a strange obsessive flurry of conjecture, patterns and motifs are under scrutiny, stories are taking root, dates are being scribbled out, names and places.

If your father, or even a forefather, set down some version of his arrival in Australia, kept some record, then perhaps you too will have

turned to your 'heirlooms' in later years, wondering what pushed him outwards, looking for a sign.

Best to keep your fingers crossed. Diaries, snap-shots, the fly leaf of a family bible, a baby's name tag, or desert stones, the chances are that what you have been left with will be less than enough. There are sure to be loose ends trailing.

Whether they came by clipper, steamer, or by dugout, your people, or simply, in the way most of us arrived here, thrust outwards on a torrent of maternal blood, the record is so often insufficient; baffling. Infant cry or desert silence, we hear what we want to hear. We see what we think we should see.

Thus, we are probably all in the one boat – descendants of the rock-cavers, diary keepers, song makers, storytellers, and those who didn't utter who keep it in their hearts. We are hunched over our cloth in the half light.

What each newcomer made of the landfall, of the terra incognita, was his or hers to dwell upon, is ours to embellish and, for those yet to come, will be a legend to remember or refine. Nothing ventured, nothing gained. If, at times, I seem to be adding to those loose ends, bear with me. We all have our own ways of rounding things off, although what we come to at the end of ends, heirlooms behind us or not, will be the same. (11-12)

In this attic, then, the heirlooms are not inanimate objects but symbols and thoughts which fade into "ghostly words" and "dusty syllables" which seem "to float and linger."

In the semiotic environment we all search the attic of history's fragments "looking for a sign." The fascination of the quest, and the ambience of the semiotic medium, unites historian and novelist in an often unwilling alliance of ambiguity. The power of the semiotic, as it describes and replaces the objects and events of the past, is inevitable, for the things of the past which are left to posterity, whether objects, stories, songs, or silence, are never enough to "tie the loose ends." Hutcheon highlights how the power of the sign is foregrounded when she declares that postmodernism

suggests that all we have ever had to work with is a system of signs, and that to call attention to this is not to deny the real, but to remember that we only *give meaning to* the real within those signifying systems. (230)

In a mix of metaphors Hasluck's narrator suggests that because the attic is bathed in half-light, we all see "what we think we should see" and hear "what we want to hear," and, therefore, we are "all in the one boat." Thus, says Hasluck-the-writer, as he rummages around the nation's attic, historians and novelists are equally semioticians and interpreters of the heirlooms of the past, pluggers of the gaps, binders of the loose ends and builders of the legends. Furthermore, he contends, switching images, as they sail the oceans of narrative-telling together, although they may look in different directions and use their stories for their own ends, they still work the riggings of the one vessel.

Hasluck-the-writer, then, stands astride the deck of the vessel shared by both historians and novelists in relation to Western Australia's past, for as a historical novelist he looks into Western Australia's "attic," retelling stories hoarded away in the state's psyche, dusting off the tales of the secession movement, violent strikes, and grand, entrepreneurial schemes doomed to failure from the start. In an "Author's Note" at the beginning of the novel Hasluck acknowledges that he has drawn on some seven historiographical and biographical works. *Truant State*, however, does not set out to claim any authenticity or "truth" in terms of historical realities. Instead the novel freely mixes historiography with fiction, sometimes turning historiography into fiction and at other times making fiction into apparent historiographic text. Many of the places and events in the novel are based on actual locations and historical accounts.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> The following details are historically documented names and places, which do not exist in Perth today, but were a part of Perth in the 1930s (the setting for *Truant State*): the Perth-Fremantle Road (21), Blackboy Camp – a canvas city for the unemployed at the foot of the Darling escarpment (245), Kitchen and Sons Soap factory in North Fremantle (44), Sir James "Moo Cow" Mitchell (212), Jimmy Four Eyes – an itinerant knife sharpener around the Claremont-Cottesloe area (148), Claremont Teachers' College, Claremont Baths, the Osborne Steps near Loreto Convent (125), Tivoli's Garage in St George's Terrace (245), Central Arcade in Perth (269). Furthermore, the wharfie riots did take place at Fremantle in 1919. The lumpers were striking over the use of non-union labour, and they rained road metal and old iron on the launch in which Premier Colebatch was travelling as detailed in the novel. One lumper died in the violent five day struggle, and his name, as described in the novel, was Tom Edwards (*The History of Fremantle*, 83).

Hasluck-the-writer also draws on documented historical events, but he laces them with his own characters. The group-settlement scheme, in which the fictional Henry Traverne participated, was, indeed, the ill-conceived brainchild of Premier “Moo Cow” Mitchell’s government. Mattaloni Claudio, a barman at the Home from Home Hotel was arrested as the instigator of the fighting in the 1934 race riots at Dingbat Flats in Kalgoorlie-Boulder (*Australia Through Time*, 278). In *Truant State*, however, the barman’s name is reversed, for the fictional Jack Traverne talks with Claudio Mattaboni, barman at the Home from Home Hotel. The historical events and characters in *Truant State* are not from the “theme park” of the All-Australian history but are built from fragments of historical accounts from books, newspapers and memories.

Some of the stories in *Truant State* are full of nostalgia mixed with fantasy and truth, such as those about Butler’s Swamp, where the Aborigine, Billy Aspro, lived with his family, surviving by cutting bush poles for clothes-line props and broom handles.<sup>37</sup> For a penny or two Billy would give a whirl on his bullroarer making the ancient water-way reverberate with the deep resonance of Aboriginal sound. Like the bullroarer’s intonation, which waxed with rage then waned to a jabber across the swamp, so the different histories and fictional stories create a cacophony of competing voices over the same events. In Hasluck’s work, there is also a cacophony of metaphors, from attics and boats, to bullroarers and tin whistles, as well as a mix of histories from the familial and personal to the national and public. Such mixes are characteristic of the postmodern and historiographic metafiction, however, in *Truant State*, due to the single narrator and the historical period, the nostalgia, the metaphors, and the voices are all predominantly male and European-Australian.

Other stories and incidents related in *Truant State* are built on tiny fragments of long-forgotten memories, and, although at the time they happened they must have

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<sup>37</sup> Butler’s Swamp (now known as Lake Claremont) is an identifiable place, and Aboriginal people did live around its edges, selling clothesline props for income.

been very dramatic to those involved, they have been assigned to a dingy corner of the state's attic which is filled with oral texts and frail memories. Indeed, for the reader, the mix of memories, whether remembered by the Hasluck-the-writer (who actually has a long family association with the places he writes about), or whether fragments gleaned from other texts (well-known or obscure), is impossible to discern. One such mix of fragments is the story of the malicious rumour which accused the fictional Jacob Vas of being linked to Peter the Painter, London's feared Bolshevik terrorist. As D.G. Clarke documents in *Will-O-The Wisp: Peter the Painter and the Anti-Tsarist Terrorists in Britain and Australia*, anarchists linked to Peter Piatkow, otherwise known as Peter the Painter, did make their presence felt in Perth. In *Truant State*, so terrifying did the spiteful hearsay become that Perth's peaceful society would quiver at the mere mention of his name. Vas, who was "followed by whispering and innuendo" about his links with Peter the Painter (113), finally exploded in a fit of rage at Butler's Swamp, and with a grappling iron whirling around his head like Billy's bullroarer, threatened Romney Guy and the Premier, James Mitchell, "the weapon soaring and moaning and booming until the air was flickering with death" (139). Brought quietly before the court and subsequently imprisoned, Vas later disappeared and, except for a brief meeting with Jack Traverne at Dingbat Flats in Kalgoorlie, was promptly forgotten. The fictional story of his life after his banishment from Perth was clearly not significant enough to be kept in the archives of the attic in *Truant State*.

Attics, like museums and other collections, cannot contain everything, and the imaginary attic in *Truant State* has a special selection of family heirlooms and memorabilia of the Traverne family who sailed from England to Fremantle to start a new, exciting life in the "young state." Some objects bring back memories of far-off, misty days in the Cotswolds, England, before Henry Traverne and his family took the sea passage to a new life in the affluent social environment of Peppermint Grove. In the small city of Perth everyone, from the Premier down, seemed to know each other. Such instant camaraderie with people of influence led to another story held in the attic: the tale of Henry's demise through an ill-fated investment in the Butler's Swamp project. The experience left him bankrupt, duped

by his so-called friends of Peppermint Grove who turned out to be nothing but unscrupulous entrepreneurs. It is images such as these which come to the narrator, Jack Traverne, as he drinks with his father on the darkened verandah one evening, pondering the immense array of memories cloaked by the night's darkness. Once again, an extended metaphor is quoted at length to give the reader a feel for the postmodern sense of history. "Sometimes," Jack muses,

on a clear night, you step outside and gaze at the sky, that roofless attic, vast and silent above your house, hazy with the cobwebs of the Milky Way.

Somewhere in a far corner, you can't help feeling, somewhere amongst the bric-a-brac and oddments – amongst the anvils or saucepans or whatever else astronomers use for names – propped up or buried in the shabby steamer trunks, there must be something which contains the secret of what those below had been and were; a book or a packet of letters, or an old musical box tinkling faintly when you opened it. . . .

Peter the Painter or some other guardian of no-man's-land could come out of the darkness to blow it all up if he wanted to but, unless the earth was snuffed out altogether, he couldn't do away with what had taken place. One story might supersede another but to understand that second tale you would have to reconstruct the first, and store things away in the room again.

Like Billy Aspro's bullroarer, there would always be an invisible flickering in the sky, a force which would simultaneously enhance and threaten life. Attics, caves, old cathedrals; things rose and fell. But up there in the planet's rafters, you could well imagine, night by night, there would be a kind of murmuring, an echo of ancestral undertones – voices gossiping, pleading, lying, praying, trafficking, testifying, or merely entertaining, voices which couldn't be silenced. If only you could listen in. (144-45)

*Truant State* is an attempt to listen in to the ancestral undertone, the multiple histories and past memories of Western Australia. But, as historiographic

metafiction reveals, such attempts at telling histories and reconstructing memories are highly problematic.

The truth, as it is constructed in *Truant State*, is that Australians have a lack of appreciation for the past, and thus for history itself. As Jack explains to his Aunt Molly, Australians don't build houses with attics: "For us the word 'attic' hardly exists" (284). In *Truant State*, then, Australian attics are mainly imaginary dreamscapes, such as those which house the Aboriginal Dreamtime or provide the environment for the bushman's propensity for tall tales and ballads. Furthermore, the novel shows that the spinning of tall yarns, and the creation of legends, while characteristically Australian, is also commingled with the "accurate" retelling of life's events. Jack Traverne, the narrator, for example, has learnt to spin a yarn in the rough and tumble of Goldfields' pubs, while writing for the unsophisticated audience of a Kalgoorlie newspaper. Accounts of the events he spread across the pages of the *Chronicle* reflect the traits of historiographic metafiction, as he wrote his articles with journalistic licence, aggressively interpreting and politically aligning the details. No doubt, in time, Australia's historians would have read the *Chronicle*'s articles as intertexts for their "orthodox" histories. The journalist, in particular, the text implies, occupies the covered-over gap effected by modernism's conflation of history and literature, but which is now made problematic by postmodernism.

However, not only journalists but newspaper magnates also exploit the covered-over gap between fiction and truth. In *Truant State*, Romney Guy, the fictional self-made newspaper magnate from the Goldfields is himself a legend who makes hearsay and rumour into accepted historical "fact." With his paper, the *Clarion*, he is credited with taking Western Australia into the Federation by convincing the Goldfields of the value of voting "Yes." His paper allegedly besmirched C.Y. O'Connor and drove him to his early death. Later, in Perth, his city newspaper, along with the *Sunday Times*, spearheads a campaign for Western Australia's secession from the Federation. In accord with the historiographic metafictional nature of the novel, he knows, as an Irish newspaper proprietor, that everything is

“grist to the rumour mill” and while people have an appetite for the truth, they have an “even greater craving for the legends” which delight and inspire hope (181). *Truant State* shows how such seemingly insubstantial but inspiring yarns, rather than the accurate reporting of facts, can prove to be very powerful in influencing the thinking and actions of political groups within society.

In contrast to those of Australia, the influential historical tales of many nations are built on a number of inspiring events and significant artefacts. Australia’s post-invasion imaginary “attic” is almost empty, the objects of memorabilia being few, and frequently considered expendable. Like South-Sea Islanders “whose practice it was to relinquish a word from their language every time a man or woman died” (195), so Australia is in danger of becoming a “continent of respectful silence” (196). It can be inferred, then, that the role of the novelist is to break that silence, to challenge the significance of the emptiness, to build meaningful legends, to dust the heirlooms, and to attempt to find answers to the questions which perplex us all. This is even more true for regional writers in Western Australia, for the public memorabilia, the memories, events and objects which make up Australia’s national memory, as argued by Patrick O’Brien in “Western Values,” are mostly from New South Wales and Victoria. Hasluck-the-writer, then, deliberately sets out to dust off some Western Australian heirlooms, to search for significance in the yarns which are spun, and to seek to explore the specific questions which haunt the West.<sup>38</sup> Paradoxically, however, in the postmodern context no answers can be expected, but what is politically appropriate to the postmodern novelist and the reader is that the questions are both asked and interrogated.

Many implied questions are raised in *Truant State* about the turbulent, significant years of 1932-33, an often neglected period in Western Australia’s history when the Secession Referendum Act was passed through the Western Australian Parliament. The voters of Western Australia, in this truly truant act, voted

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<sup>38</sup> Hasluck-the-critic, writing about *Truant State*, accuses “literary people” of being “notoriously myopic” because they fail to see the relevance of novels about local histories (“The Past’s Deceitful Dream,” 119).



overwhelmingly, on the 8th April 1933, to secede.<sup>39</sup> It was an angry time when frustration with the central powers in Canberra overflowed in the West, mainly due to concerns with high tariffs on manufactured goods from the Eastern States, high unemployment and the depressed economy. The sense of grievance can be detected in the words of the submission sent to Westminster, England, by a Joint Committee of the Houses of the Western Australian Parliament:

The main reasons by which His Majesty's subjects (*sic*) in Western Australia are constrained to secede from the Commonwealth, and to resume the position which they previously enjoyed as a self-governing unit within the British Empire, are that the combined effects of an Australian protective customs tariff and of free trade between the States of the Commonwealth, have inflicted grave injustice, great hardship, and severe distress upon the people of Western Australia; that the result of the combined effects of Australian protection and interstate free trade are such as to have most seriously endangered the whole economic structure and social fabric of the State; and that adequate and necessary relief from the ill effects of Australian protection and free trade as aforesaid, cannot be obtained by the people of Western Australia otherwise than by their withdrawal from the Commonwealth. (*Case of the People*, 328)

Hasluck's tale develops the sense of parochial anger which pervaded the state's population, and gives the same reasons as the petition for the secession movement's existence. Western Australia, states the narrator in *Truant State*, was "hamstrung by the federal Loan Council" and "dragged down by policies and tariff barriers designed to suit insolvent manufacturers in the east" (212). The novel, however, does not simply reflect orthodox historiography in the tale of secession, but it problematises and questions the underlying reasons for the push for the state's independence from the Commonwealth.

The state's truant attempt at secession was not a momentary reaction, but a considered response over a long history of felt injustice. Western Australia came

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<sup>39</sup> In "Strife on the Western Front," Mark Skulley notes that the vote was "two-to-one to secede, with most of the support from the wheatbelt and south-west and the least from the Goldfields and the Kimberley" (13).

late into the Federation in 1901, and only then because the vote from the Goldfields tipped the numbers for the majority. In 1906 the Western Australian Parliament “supported secession in principle but nothing eventuated” (*Australia Through Time*, 275).<sup>40</sup> The opening paragraphs of “The Case for Secession” express the long-term sentiment for secession:

The Vote for Federation was the outcome of promises made. The vote for Secession is the outcome of expectations unrealised. That Federation would be a success was a mere guess. That to Western Australia it has been a failure is the proved result of 32 years’ experience. In 1900 the people of Western Australia favoured Federation largely on sentimental grounds. In 1933 they favoured withdrawal from Federation in circumstances which offered clear evidence of the adverse economic effects of Federation.

(*Case of the People*, 1)

The argument of the state, then, was an economic argument tied to the particular circumstances of Western Australia in the first thirty years of the Federation.

The Western Australian secession case, long-standing though it was, did not go unanswered, and the Federal Government had *The Case for Union* prepared. The “Foreword” was written by Joseph Lyons, the Prime Minister of Australia at the time, in which he asserted that, in his opinion, the affirmative case for union was “unanswerable” (3). *Truant State*, however, does not dwell on the historical accounts of secession in Western Australia, but instead critiques the reasons for the movement through the character of Romney Guy. In the novel, the *Sunday Times*, which actually has run and continues to promote a long-standing campaign for secession in Western Australia, is also joined by Romney Guy’s paper, the *Clarion*. Ironically, in the blend of history and fiction, Romney who champions secession was also responsible for pushing Western Australia into Federation. Romney’s attitude is “What’s good for me is good for the state” (258). Hasluck, although identified as a Western Australian writer, questions the attitudes and motives of some of the state’s official histories and the role of its elites, showing

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<sup>40</sup> For a timeline on the secession movement, from Federation to the establishment of the WA Secession 2001 Association, see Skulley page 13.

how secession has been a hollow game of the rich to advance their own interests – another project to make another buck. In more recent years, it has been the rich mining magnate, the late Lang Hancock, who espoused the secessionist cause.

While self-interest lies behind the secession movement, the desire for the state's independence is also constructed in *Truant State* as the desire for a fresh start. According to the narrator, there are two types of fresh starts in Australia, both of which are tinged with disillusionment. The first is characterised by giving up the failed “big idea” or “fanciful notion” to return to the ordinary: “Just jam tart, please. No mousse. No mess” (141). The second fresh start is the new beginning which simply repeats the last process over again: acting “in the new country as we acted in the old” (141). But, in Australia, regardless of their nature, all fresh starts never amount to much. Secession, as a fresh start, was the giving up of the big idea of Federation to return to what existed before. In their document to Westminster the Western Australian Parliamentary Committee states:

The people of Western Australia, by way of the Secession Referendum have overwhelmingly expressed a desire to alter their existing form of Government; to withdraw from the Australian Federal Commonwealth; and resume, as an integral part of the British Empire, the system of self-government such as they enjoyed and prospered under before they entered into the Federal system in 1901. (*Case for People*, 1)

Secession. A fresh start which never happened. It appeared to promise much, with the excitement of truancy, but, in fact, it was driven by a desire to return to the yoke of empire.

But *Truant State* speculates not only on the fresh start wanted by the secession movement, but also on the one desired by the right-wing forces which opposed it.<sup>41</sup> These forces, being pro-monarchist, were the type of Australian fresh start which reflected the old in the new. The 1920s and 30s saw the development of many pro-monarchist, right-wing groups across Australia. Some of these quasi-military

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<sup>41</sup> Current issues of right-wing forces in Australia are reflected in the recent debate on the Republic, and the emergence of Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party.

organisations, the most public of them being the New Guard, were extremely secretive in both their membership and activities. In *The New Guard Movement 1931-1935*, Keith Amos documents the known activities of the New Guard, which he describes as “a particular, post-war, paramilitary manifestation of longstanding authoritarian and elitist sentiments characteristic of the conservative Right” (111). Amos discloses how many versions of the right wing movement, such as the White Guard, the Old Guard and the New Guard arose in various parts of Australia, especially Victoria and New South Wales, due to the conditions of the inter-war period. High unemployment, the large number of disillusioned returned service men, the rise of communism and fascism in Europe, and the dominance of socialist governments in many Australian states all contributed to the emergence of these organisations.<sup>42</sup> In early 1932, the New Guard, which was particularly dedicated to the overthrow of the Labor government of J.T. Lang, had a membership of about 39,000 in New South Wales (Amos, 110). The New Guardsmen believed they were rallying “to prevent New South Wales from becoming a Soviet State, for not to do so was in their view an invitation to property confiscation, the downfall of British tradition and the destruction of all they held dear” (Amos, 115). Both the White Guard and the more public New Guard of New South Wales are mentioned in *Truant State*, and much of the detail elaborated by Amos is similarly represented, although, in the novel, these features are primarily ascribed to the fictional West Guard. The imaginary West Guard, like the New Guard, is elitist with high profile business men and lawyers making up a large part of its secret membership.

Historiographically, Hasluck-the-writer accurately represents the record of events surrounding the most famous act of the New Guard: the cutting of the ribbon at the opening of the Sydney Harbour Bridge by Captain Francis de Groot. Amos records that de Groot was fulfilling a promise made by the New Guard’s leader, Colonel Eric Campbell, that Premier Lang would not have the honour of opening the bridge, which at that time had the distinction of being “the mightiest single-arched

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<sup>42</sup> For a detailed discussion of the conditions behind support for the secretive Old Guard, and the more public New Guard, see Andrew Moore’s “The Old Guard and ‘Countrymindedness’ During the Great Depression.” Similarities with the present growth of One Nation are striking.

bridge anywhere in the world" (Russel Ward, 197). Amos credits de Groot with saying that his intentions were not only to keep his leader's promise, but also to

‘prevent the New Guard from disintegrating and while showing Lang and his mob that they cannot push us around, let the sharp sword be a hint to the Communists that revolution here would not be a one-sided affair.’ (82)

A flood of letters and telegrams poured in from around the British Empire in a tremendous response to de Groot's action, but within months Lang had been dismissed in controversial circumstances and the New Guard membership was in dramatic decline.

In *Truant State*, the fictional Romney accurately comments that, "The New Guard boasted that they wouldn't let Lang open the bridge and they've proved their point" (210). However, with novelistic licence, Hasluck-the-writer draws on the dramatic events which surround the opening of the Sydney Harbour Bridge on Saturday 19th March 1932, harmonising them with Busselton's centenary celebrations in Western Australia's south-west. As the guests are gathering for the evening meal, Bonnie Guy rushes in with the news that Lang, Premier of New South Wales, has been assassinated. The radio announcement had been partially overheard by the Guy's kitchen-maid, who relayed it to Bonnie in a garbled form, and then, Bonnie, in breathless haste, had given the dramatic news to the bored gathering. When the truth is finally drawn out from the crackling radio-set, it informs them that all that has occurred is that the ribbon on the Bridge had been severed twice. Like many places in Australia, the news is interpreted by the gathering at Busselton as a signal to the various Guards across Australia to spring to action. Nothing, of course, happens.

Furthermore, in *Truant State* the speculative history of the West Guard reveals that D.H. Lawrence got his material for his Australian novel, *Kangaroo*, from a meeting with the leader of the West Guard, Geoffrey Agar. In this account, the leaders of the West Guard had confused D.H. Lawrence with Lawrence of Arabia, and Agar's crass back-slapping ways had sent the writer fleeing to the Eastern States. In *Kangaroo*, Lawrence supposedly locates the West Guard in Sydney as

the White Guard in order to avoid libel claims. That was in 1922. Now, in 1932, Jack philosophises, “Fiction and reality. Lawrence writes a prophetic book. Ten years later leaders of the New Guard take to the streets. The future is a cave inhabited by shadows of our present selves” (211). Hasluck-the-writer plays with history, teasing the reader, for Lawrence did have a short stay in Western Australia, but the West Guard and Lawrence’s meetings with them are pure historical speculation.

Then, like the New Guard, the fictional West Guard in *Truant State* disappears from public view, for the murder of Stewart Lacey, the secretary of the West Guard and a former adjutant to General Blythe, is thought by the leaders of the Guard to be the insidious work of the Bolshevik terrorists led by Peter the Painter. Following Lacey’s death, all evidence of the West Guard’s existence disappears without trace. Many say, however, that it still continues in a secretive, underground manner, waiting for the right time to surface again.

Thus both the West Guard and the secession movement are characterised as failed attempts at a fresh start. The migrant experience, too, is critiqued in *Truant State*, especially the image of Western Australia as a land of opportunity and new beginnings. Jack Traverne, the protagonist/narrator, is not a “true blue” Aussie who speaks with a “sandgroper’s” passion on Western Australian issues, but rather is an English immigrant. Migration, fresh starts and new opportunities are a constant theme of the novel, but they never bring the prosperity they seem to promise. The need for a new beginning is why Henry Traverne originally immigrated with his family from the Cotswolds to Australia, and it is the reason he moved to Northcliffe after the failure of the Butler’s Swamp syndicate. Jack was seeking a new start after his failure at Teachers Training College when he went to Kalgoorlie as a journalist. Finally, at the end of the book, the promise of fresh starts in Western Australia completely fades as Jack returns to the old world of his beginnings, the Cotswolds in England.

*Truant State*, then, as historiographic metafiction, openly plays on the histories of the Traverne family and the migrant experience, as well as the histories of Western Australia and Australia. It does this primarily through the narrative voice of Jack. But like many postmodern texts it has an embedded, hidden narrative, for it is haunted by the presence of an absent story. The letters of Henry Traverne to Aunt Molly are constantly referred to, but the reader is never made privy to their contents. Henry faithfully writes his version of the same events chronicled by Jack on an old, portable writing desk – a family heirloom brought from England. The letters are sent to his sister, but what he writes in them is a mystery to Jack. Perhaps, Jack muses, they hold the key to understanding the journey of shattered dreams the family has endured. But Henry never shares the contents of his letters with Jack. Later, as Jack remembers the despondent days in Northcliffe he recalls how he interrupted his father as he wrote those letters.

[I] found him seated at his portable writing desk at the window of his bedroom, using a kerosene tin cushioned by a chaff bag for a seat. He would put down his pen, slowly and deliberately, but when he turned to face me it was not a smile but with a terrible blankness, a kind of remoteness, as though his mind was out there at the fringe of the gloomy forest . . . (188)

When Jack returns to England after his father's death, Aunt Molly offers him the opportunity to read the letters Henry had sent her, but Jack declines. Thus, while *Truant State* contains at least two stories, only one is told, and, ironically, the absent Australian story remains undisturbed in a Cotswolds attic.

Finally, then, *Truant State* makes a political statement in that it shows the state's significant events are self-indulgent, rebellious moments rather than serious commitments to life-long principles. The Premiers, entrepreneurs, the shakers and movers of Western Australia achieve nothing in the end. This is what Jack thinks at the conclusion of the novel, for he realises that only his whisky-sodden father, crushed, humiliated, embittered, and in self-imposed exile in the state's karri country,

had never compromised. He had come to the new land with certain hopes, with certain convictions, and had stuck to them. He hadn't cheated. He hadn't pursued his own advantage. (280)

Such high ideals and nostalgic pangs of guilt for the father he has rejected and despised do not provide answers for Jack. His father had clearly lost in the game of life; the questions, the enigmas, remain. Like the historian, the novelist and the journalist/narrator must search through the junk-filled attic for clues. Literature, like history, is

a kind of inquest. To find out how the story ended, you have to find out how it started: one thing led to another. To make sense of such things somehow made it easier to go on. (283)

And yet, as the postmodern asserts, nothing can be truly known of the past. We are condemned to fill in the gaps with our own constructions, to create multiple stories of single events, and to endlessly speculate on the way it was.

Historiographic metafiction, as a form of the postmodern novel, describes two of Hasluck's novels from the period in his writing which is immersed in regional and postmodern issues. Hasluck-the-writer problematises the truthful and fictional nature of both history and literature in each of these works. In *The Bellarmine Jug*, he reinscribes the history and significance of the *Batavia* mutiny, and he violates the novel form by the irony of making his historical novel a hoax. In *Truant State*, he rewrites the history of the turbulent years of the early 1930s when the secession moment gripped Western Australia. He undermines the history of Western Australia and the novel itself through his unreliable, volatile, self-interested narrator, who rejects Western Australia and its promises by his return to England at the novel's end. The issues of historiographic metafiction tease the reader in all of Hasluck's novels to some extent, but in his next three novels he tackles literature and history's attempts to constitute meaningful narratives in a strikingly imaginative and creative way.



## Chapter 6

**Foucault, Bentham and Hasluck**

*In the mind's atlas,  
footnotes, like broken rules,  
are not without importance.*  
(from "Islands," 38)

While historiographic metafiction provides a framework for the reading of *Truant State* and *The Bellarmine Jug*, another group of Hasluck's novels can be productively read through Michel Foucault's theoretical and juridical discourse outlined in *Discipline and Punish*. Two years before Hasluck published his first novel, *Quarantine*, in 1979, Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* was translated into English. Foucault's text has a theoretical and historical framework which fits both the literary transitions and the modern/postmodern divide in Hasluck's work, and it provides a necessary background for the examination of Hasluck's last three novels. What this chapter will show is that the argument expounded in Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* provides a descriptive model of how Hasluck's novels move theoretically from the modernistic universality of the quarantine to the postmodern, multi-faceted features of the panoptic. Furthermore, the chapter will also make a series of cross-connections between Hasluck's work, the work of Jeremy Bentham, and the colonial history of Australia.

Foucault, in his history of the penitentiary, shows how the medieval ideas of punishment, inflicted on the body to save the soul, change to discourses of reform through discipline. According to Foucault, the Western world has undergone many changes in the modernisation of its societies, however, no change has been more immense than the shift from a feudal to a disciplined society. This change is fundamental to all the other changes in the process of modernity, influencing industrial, economic, political and social reform. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault defines discipline as

neither an institution nor . . . an apparatus; it is a type of power, a modality for its exercise, comprising a whole set of techniques, procedures, levels of application, targets; it is a 'physics,' or an 'anatomy' of power, a technology. (215)

The changes – from a society governed by the sovereign's power to one governed by an all-pervasive power of discipline – were gradual, but, according to Foucault, they were accelerated and even precipitated by the coming together of various disciplines in eighteenth-century institutions such as the barracks, schools, hospitals and prisons.

With these institutional changes, the social or human sciences have emerged, grounded in the proliferation of formal and informal data collected from the events and circumstances of individual lives within the institutions. In order to maintain and train the army, in order to care properly for patients in hospital, in order to give children a thorough and uniform education, records needed to be kept and each part and phase of an individual's life needed to be documented and evaluated. The purpose of this documentation was ostensibly to help the personal development of each individual, but more specifically it was useful to enhance the domination of the institution itself. The value of the individual in a disciplined society is his or her usefulness to the institution, measured by his or her willingness to be moulded and reformed to become an efficient, economical unit.

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault describes the two forms of a disciplined society as the "enclosed" and the "panopticon," the aim of each form being the construction of docile yet useful subjects. Although of French nationality, Foucault borrowed the concept of the panopticon from Jeremy Bentham, an English philosopher and social engineer at the forefront of the push for penal reform in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century England. In his day, Bentham decried the harsh penal code which exiled prisoners to distant colonies, where a model of punishment was enforced which parallels Foucault's "enclosed discipline" (216), a form of quarantine wherein the isolated unit could be totally disciplined in a rigorous way.

The quarantine, according to Foucault, is a severe disciplinary technique. It is a strong-armed attempt to impose order upon disorder. Even when disciplinary techniques are less severe, more subtle and panoptic, behind them continues to lie the possibility of the quarantine (note for example, the inevitable calls for the permanent removal and isolation of criminal elements from society whenever a perceived crime wave appears to show society falling into disorder). Foucault states that behind

the disciplinary mechanism can be read the haunting memory of  
‘contagions’: of the plague, of rebellions, crimes, vagabondage, desertions,  
people who appear and disappear, live and die in disorder. (198)

The leper, who came to symbolise the “contagions,” is excluded from the pure society, and through a strict, regimented administration the disease is removed and the infected segment of society is restored to order again. This discipline is applied to all those in the affected segment of the community, both the affected and the unaffected, until a “pure” society is regained. In order for society to return to normal, death must often occur, either the death of the abnormality, or the death of those persons affected by the disease. Until such times as death occurs, the imposition of the quarantine must remain to prevent the contamination of the wider community.

Of particular interest to my reading of Hasluck’s work through Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish*, is the fact that Bentham saw the early penal colony of New South Wales as a prime example of all that was wrong with the philosophy of the quarantine. As an isolated island far removed from Europe, Australia was considered as the perfect site for the quarantining of Britain’s convicts. Those convicts were not expected to return across the vast oceans to the mother country. So isolated was it that Bentham maintained the sentence of transportation to Australia was usually a sentence for life, as the convicts had no means of returning to Britain. Thus, he was a vehement critic of the transportation system to the antipodes, describing New South Wales, in contrast to the Americas, as the ultimate place of exile. The legislators in Britain, claims Bentham in a letter to Lord Pelham, saw the distance to New South Wales as

the supposed mother of 'security,' . . . the virtue which it is evident was regarded as making up for the absence of every other. Of this attribute it was seen to be possessed in a degree altogether beyond dispute. The moon was then, as it continues to be, inaccessible: upon earth there was no accessible spot more distant than New South Wales. . . . Let a man once get there, we shall never be troubled with him any more.

Setting aside law and justice, the expedient was at any rate a plausible one: and except . . . the Calcutta black-hole, and a few other such foreign devices, a remedy against living nuisances could hardly be more promising or more simple. But suppose for a moment any such considerations as those of law and justice to be entitled to a place in the account, surely never did this country witness an exercise of power more flagrantly reprehensible, more completely indefensible. (*Works* Vol. 4, 186)

Bentham argued that transportation to New South Wales was a death sentence for many convicts. He backed up his claims by documenting that, in the eight years from 1787 to 1795, out of 5196 convicts shipped to New South Wales 522 died at sea during the long voyage, and, of the remaining 4674 who landed in the colony, a further 936 were dead from famine and sickness by the end of that duration ("Table of Convict Mortality," 198). Thus, in eight years of transportation, more than 1 in every 4 convicts died. This death sentence was viewed by Bentham as an illegal, additional form of punishment imposed upon convicts transported for a wide variety of crimes. All this was enforced with the aim of "purifying" England from the criminal element in its emerging industrial society.

Foucault argues that the quarantine is a political dream which envisages a pure community, excluding through "marking" those who are classified as impure or abnormal (*Discipline*, 198). The drive to attain a pure, reformed society is a modernist goal of a futuristic civilisation uncluttered by the chains of the past. It is often a universalist dream that applies to all humankind. Such societal disciplines reached a pinnacle in modern times with the death camps and the quarantining of non-compliant and unwanted people under Fascism, Communism, and, in more recent times, the ethnic-cleansing in Eastern Europe.

The second form of the disciplined society, which Foucault describes as largely supplanting the enclosed system of the quarantine, is the mechanism of “panopticism.” Whereas the quarantine aims at a pure society, the panoptic is driven by the political dream of a disciplined society. Rather than marking the abnormal, the panoptic, which is haunted by the fear of the plague, analyses and distributes, calling “for multiple separations, individualising distributions, an organisation in depth of surveillance and control, an intensification and ramification of power” (198). The panoptic is characterised by tolerance, discipline and surveillance. Panopticism, according to Foucault, is not an isolated system in that it maintains and uses the multiple forms of power which already permeate society, infiltrating, undermining, linking and subjugating them. Through this infiltration, Foucault states, panopticism “assures an infinitesimal distribution of the power relations” (216). However, the quarantine and the panoptic are linked, for, asserts Foucault, they are “different projects . . . but not incompatible ones” (199). For example, some contemporary, morally lenient forms of modernism quarantine their adversaries in a panoptic way, isolating opponents and undesirable political, social and intellectual people and ideas in a psychological and social manner. Political correctness is an example of a more acceptable form of modernism which quarantines people through the panoptic power of the dispersed, but ever-observant, instruments of the media and public opinion.

The displacement in the discourse of discipline from the quarantine to the panoptic describes a similar movement in society from the discourse of modernism to postmodernism. Modernism, like the mechanism of the quarantine, tends towards an enclosed fabrication with few links to the historical past, whereas postmodernism, like the panoptic, is unconfined and parasitic in its infiltrating of all other discourses while it parodies and uses them for its own purpose. Similarly, just as the quarantine and the panoptic are not totally separate identities, so modernism and postmodernism overlap and intersect with each other. Likewise, the discourses which sweep through the critical themes of Hasluck’s novels follow the same dominant and recessive patterns from the quarantine and the concerns of

modernism, to the panoptic and issues of postmodernism. Hasluck's first novel, *Quarantine*,<sup>43</sup> for example, examines the dynamics of discipline within the quarantine situation through a liberal-humanist framework, while the later works, such as *The Hand That Feeds You*, *The Bellarmine Jug*, *The Country Without Music*, and *A Grain of Truth*, are concerned with the unseen, all-pervasive, panoptic discipline within the institutions and the discourses of history, politics and the law. This chapter, however, will concentrate on the major shift which occurs between Hasluck's two early novels, *Quarantine* and *The Hand That Feeds You*.

### ***Quarantine***

In *Quarantine*, feelings of guilt and inferiority drive the narration of the story. All the passengers from the ship are "lepers" in that they are marked people. They must live in enforced isolation, even though the disease, or cause, of the quarantining is unknown. The attempt to impose control on them continues in spite of the self-contained society at the quarantine station being swept along by the unexplained and all-powerful force of a *faszad*,<sup>44</sup> in which natural law and justice seems to be pushed aside. In the *faszad*, events take on an unexpected life of their own, leaving a trail of ruin and guilt behind. *Quarantine*, then, becomes an exploration of the guilt of the narrator who seeks to appease his conscience by defending his conduct to the reader who acts as the jury. The presence of the discipline of the quarantine pervades the text and governs the relationship between the reader and the narrator.

Moreover, on an internal level, the narrator is also writing the novel as a confession to his editorial friend and colleague. "The real question," he admits, "is am I brave enough to be frank? Notwithstanding our long association, can I dare to speak the truth; can I afford to reveal myself in this memoir – this confession, even to you?" (10). The confession is a product of the narrator's internalisation of guilt at the untimely and violent death of David Shears – one of the passengers. The

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<sup>43</sup> In the context of this thesis a very appropriate name.

<sup>44</sup> See Chapter Two for a description of a *faszad*.

guilty soul is an integral part of the system of discipline, both in the mechanism of the quarantine and the panoptic. Foucault describes the soul as born

out of the methods of punishment, supervision and constraint. This real, non-corporal soul is not a substance; it is the element in which are articulated the effects of a certain type of power and the reference of a certain type of knowledge. . . . The soul is the effect and instrument of a political anatomy; the soul is the prison of the body. (*Discipline*, 29-30)

The narrator's soul, then, fashioned in the political anatomy of the unfolding drama and the relationships enacted during the quarantine, seeks its purgation through the confessional. The transgressions which afflict the narrator's soul, while dominated by the death of Shears, are multiple. He has allowed himself to be thrust into the position of judge, even though he is only a law student. After initially being unwilling to become the secretary of the investigation committee set up by Burgess to find and deal with the reason for the quarantine, the narrator meekly accepts his election to that position. He then transgresses the orders of Burgess by going into town with Shears. Finally, he betrays his friendship with Shears by refusing to return with him a second time to the town, an action which would have pacified the murderous anger of the ship's passengers and, perhaps, saved Shears's life.

Even after the events of the quarantine the narrator's guilt dominates his life in other matters: quarrelling with his faculty and always "harking back to the old days" (130). His editorial friend has counselled him "that in an age of increasing scepticism, to speak of inner truth is a sign of abnormality; to make a stand, a symptom of ill-health" (130). To oppose the enclosed discipline of the quarantine, or the discipline of an institution, is depicted as an abnormality and, so, the narrator seeks to excuse himself for not speaking out for David Shears.

Ironically, however, the narrator/confessor writes his notes in the margins of his Borthwick edition of *Justinian's Institutes*, thus recording his transgressions in the ancient manual of jurisprudence, the book of the science or philosophy of law. The margin where his notes begin contains the passage:

A madman, and a ward without his tutor's authority, cannot begin to possess, since they have not the intention to hold, however much they are in physical contact with the thing, as though one put something in the hand of a sleeper. (81)<sup>45</sup>

Thus the disenfranchised, the madman and the child, if they are to be given the responsibility of possessing anything, are subject to the authority of the tutor. As an integral part of the discipline of both the quarantine and the panoptic systems, the tutor has many forms, such as the headmaster in the school, the matron in the hospital, the sergeant in the barracks and the superintendent in the prison. The narrator, being a novice, or child, in matters relating to the law, is subject to the gaze of Burgess, the autocrat or "tutor" of the investigating committee. When the meeting votes for a motion which he did not wish to support, the narrator comments that almost "all the hands in the room rose in unison except those of David Shears, Jack Morley and my own. . . . Burgess turned and looked at me. His grey eyes were difficult to avoid I raised my hand" (101). Again the narrator seeks to excuse himself and absolve his guilt through the ineffectiveness of his naïve status, and his deference to and dependence on Burgess.

A master of both the internal and external infections of the quarantine is Dr Magro. He has become immune to the quarantine experience itself, for after many years of combating disease in the Sudan, he has become indifferent to the rigorous discipline of medicine required at the Quarantine Station. While completing the paper-work to please the authorities, Dr Magro reveals to the narrator his conviction that ingenuity and compromise are more important remedies than medicine (49). He is a man "accustomed to refusal" (50). Dr Magro has learnt that reticence and silence are often to be most valued, and, he has come to believe that allowing a sickness to take its course in the community is sometimes better than immunisation and, by inference, the quarantine itself. He has concluded from his experience that it is "best to allow time for the symptoms of the disease to manifest themselves" (50), for, in time, the body can build its own resistance to the alien presence. Dr Magro's views on disease management also apply to his attitude to

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<sup>45</sup> See also *Quarantine* pages 14 and 188.



the quarantine, for he appears to have built an immunity to the truth so that he no longer even desires it. This makes a mockery of the discipline of the quarantine situation. Still, Dr Magro is in complete control, and nothing happens without his permission, regardless of the legitimacy or illegitimacy of his authority, the lack of interest he displays in the plight of the passengers, or the infuriating silence he maintains on the reasons for their detention.

Thus, in summary, the novel mimics the enclosed discipline of the quarantine situation through the isolation of its setting and by the fact that the situation is resolved by a death. Guilt forces the outward conditions of the quarantine to be internalised, so that the sickness of suspicion, fear and guilt festers in the unconscious of many of the characters. However, Dr Magro has built an immunity to guilt, and to the mundane and boring which characterise the uncertain conditions of the quarantine. Thus, *Quarantine* can be seen as a text in which some of the constructs resist the notion of the quarantine, in much the same way as the constant presence of the postmodern in the modern resists the constructs of modernism. The resistances to the quarantine cause a dissipation of discipline, a questioning of the “legitimate” truth and order, so fostering a controversial empowering of an alternative, “illegitimate” authority which carries with it the threat of taking matters into its own hands.

As a straight historical account, *Quarantine* has no correlation with the experience of European settlement and invasion of Australia, but allegorically, the narrative’s internalisation of the conditions of the quarantine from the hot desert sands to the tormented recesses of the mind is a process with many parallels to Australia’s past. Allegorically, *Quarantine* is similar to Australia’s “quarantine” era with its isolation and dictatorial control by appointed governors. England being 12,000 miles away meant a twelve to eighteen month turn-around in sailing time before a response could be sent back to the antipodes from Westminster. Thus, as David Neal notes in *The Rule of Law in a Penal Colony*,

when English instructions arrived they had often been overtaken by events. This heightened the strategic importance of local political institutions –

including the courts – in resolving issues without resort to England . . . .

(16)

Moreover, the quarantine situation was heightened by the disciplinary regime of the early governors who were virtually a succession of autocratic rulers.

Very early in the colony's history, Jeremy Bentham, the reformer whose ideas Foucault draws on in *Discipline and Punish*, realised the governor of New South Wales was exercising illegitimate powers in the enclosed system of the penal colony. In "A Plea For a Constitution," (*Works* Vol. 4, 249-84) Bentham persuasively reasoned that legislation could only be enacted by an elected parliament, and that the governor of New South Wales as a representative of the king had no power to create legislation. This, claimed Bentham, was being overlooked in New South Wales, and, as the colony had no elected parliament, many Britons were being given extended criminal sentences illegally. Bentham set out his argument in the following way:

Legislative power is, and always has been necessary, for the maintenance of government in the colony of New South Wales. Lawful power of legislation exists not – has not at any time existed – in that colony. Actual power of legislation has at all times been – and still continues to be – exercised there. The power thus illegally assumed, was employed, as it had been assumed, for oppressive as well as anti-constitutional purposes.

Britons, to whom their country, with the whole world besides, was open by law, have been kept in confinement in that land of exile. Britons, free by law as Britons can be, have been kept in that land of exile in a state of bondage. . . . Not a governor, not a magistrate who has ever acted there, that has not exposed himself – that to this hour does not stand exposed – to prosecutions upon prosecutions, to actions upon actions, from which not even the Crown can save him, and of which ruin may be the consequence.

(*Works* Vol. 4, 253)

Bentham had the singular insight of a prophet, for as Neal states, the situation with the governors "was not well-known in England" (95). With its isolation, uncertainty, conflict and breakdown in the legal processes, the colonial system

became characterised by severe physical discipline which was regulated through absolutism and dictatorship. Transportation, for every prisoner sent to New South Wales, was, to Bentham, at least equivalent to banishment for life regardless of the sentence originally imposed. Such banishment was a punishment that made a mockery of the nuances within a judicial system where the sentence was supposed to be a punishment which fitted the crime. In Bentham's considered view, it needed to be replaced.

Bentham argued that in the light of the conditions of the antipodes, such as the severe isolation, illegal extra-judicial sentencing and illegitimate legislation, the penitentiary was a better system of punishment than transportation. More specifically, he promoted his concept of the Panopticon. He reasoned that when compared with transportation to New South Wales the Panopticon was almost four times as economical; was more just in allowing a graduated scale of punishment; was a better visual deterrent to British criminals when situated within city precincts; was better placed to secure compensation from criminals to recompense victims of crime; and was more useful in reforming prisoners into good citizens through education, religious instruction and surveillance. This final aspect of continuous inspection was to Bentham "the only effective instrument of reformative management . . ." (*Works* Vol. 4, 175). The use of New South Wales as a penal colony, simply because it was the remotest colony on earth, was, to Bentham, a great injustice, and highly problematic to the development of a humane criminal justice system.

But what Bentham did not realise was that the quarantine situation in Australia, like that in Hasluck's *Quarantine*, also had anti-quarantine elements which made the strict conditions of the quarantine a farce. Due to resistance, and sometimes with a measure of good fortune thrown in, the severe colonial regulations and the sentences of isolation were often broken. Just as the narrator and David Shears in *Quarantine* momentarily freed themselves from the confines of the state of quarantine by escaping to the town, so in Australia the autocracy of the governors was, from time to time, resisted, challenged, flouted and even overthrown. The

groupings of the “emancipists” and the “exclusivists,” for example, fought each other and the various governors in order to gain the upper hand. Neal argues that the same rule of law which governed the isolated colony was also used to limit the autocracy of the governors. “Political power,” states Neal,

was an open question in New South Wales. . . . As various governors found, depending on which faction they favoured, both groups could fiercely and effectively contest the seeming autocratic powers of the governor, even without the traditional instrument of a colonial parliament. (20)

The instrument which political oppositions used to challenge the rule of law was those very courts of the rule of law. In fact, Neal claims the “courts served as a *de facto parliament*” (21). In time, the use of the rule of law in Australia to combat the discipline of the quarantine, led to an easing of the restrictions on both the convicts and the emancipists, and finally helped precipitate the abolition of transportation itself.

Neal, writing with the luxury of hindsight, sees transportation to New South Wales as “the cusp between the old and the new penal systems” (14). Furthermore, he acknowledges Bentham’s influence by linking his philosophies to changes to the British criminal justice system in the 1830s, which in turn led to the termination of convict transportation and cleared the way for self-government for the Australian colonies. Thus, with the end of transportation to the antipodes in 1868, and the establishment of the Australian parliaments, Australia entered into the twentieth-century as a nation which was fast losing the isolation associated with the circumstances of the quarantine. Through political figures such as Billy Hughes it began to take its place in world affairs. For many years, however, the legacy of Australia’s quarantine-past remained, though often at an unconscious level. Much greater in magnitude than the guilt of the narrator of *Quarantine*, Australia’s shame, until recent times, has been evident in the overlooking of its convict heritage, and in its infamous cultural cringe.<sup>46</sup> Today, however, Australia is no

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<sup>46</sup> For the argument behind the cultural cringe see A.A. Phillips’ “The Cultural Cringe” in *The Australian Tradition*, pages 89-95, and P.R. Stephensen’s “The Foundations of Culture in Australia: An Essay Towards National Self-Respect,” in *The Writer in Australia: 1856-1964*, pages 204-44.

longer an isolated, quarantine outpost of a distant power. As a new nation it has moved from a state of enclosed discipline to a society disciplined predominantly through the invisible institutional structures of its society, in the pattern of the panopticon. This transformation in discipline, expounded in Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, is similar to the ideological shift in focus which occurs between *Quarantine* and Hasluck's third novel, *The Hand That Feeds You*.

### **Foucault and Panopticism**

It is Bentham's architectural figure of the Panopticon which most clearly demonstrates to Foucault the mechanism of panopticism in the disciplined community. Panopticism is a subtle discipline of continuous, invisible inspection which leads to reform through the internalisation of both power and its discipline. Bentham's Panopticon was an imagined multi-storey structure which had a circular outer building with cells, all of which had window openings in the outer wall as well as barred apertures opening onto a central courtyard. In these cells could be placed the people to be supervised, whether they be soldiers, hospital or asylum patients, prisoners, school children or factory workers. Within the centre courtyard of the circular building was a tower with windows from which could be viewed all the cells of the outer structure. With the back-lighting of the sun streaming in from the windows in the outer wall, all the occupants and their activities could be observed from the centre tower. It was impossible, however, for those in the cells to know if and when they were being observed. In this way, those under observation would be "totally seen without ever seeing," and those who might supervise in the central tower would see "everything without ever being seen" (*Discipline*, 202). The invisibility of the supervisor would guarantee the automatic functioning of the power of discipline, for the internal anxieties of those in the cells would cause a self-regulatory discipline. This efficient use of disciplinary power de-individualises power, for it does not matter who supervises or who is supervised, whether one or many supervise, or whether the supervision is continuous or spasmodic. It is the *potential* of the continuous gaze which produces

the power for discipline. Therefore, Foucault states, “real subjection is born mechanically from a fictitious relation” (202).

To Foucault, the Panopticon is a political technology, rather than an actual physical structure. It is a machine; a mechanism where human behaviour can be observed; a laboratory in which the inmates can be worked on, educated, altered, healed or reformed. As a mechanism, the Panopticon does not have to take an architectural form in the shape of a prison, hospital, school or barracks, but rather it can be an invisible structure within society which, through surveillance and examination, exerts power to discipline the lives of people. It is polyvalent in that it can serve many purposes, and is not tied to any specific use (Foucault, 205). Through its invisible presence it can penetrate, undermine and connect the most diverse and distant segments of society, inducing the powerful gaze of an invisible surveillance which causes the subject to alter and police his or her own behaviour.

An example of panoptic discipline in our modern cities is the use of unmarked police cars, so that no driver knows when he or she is being watched. The installation of numerous video cameras on city street corners and in public areas, in trains and on stations, in public lifts and throughout multi-storey buildings is another panoptic influence which means that the public never knows when it is being monitored. The sophisticated technology available for telephone tapping, electronic eavesdropping and satellite surveillance means fewer conversations and actions can be guaranteed secure from outside intrusion. Credit cards and automatic banking machines allow a different form of surveillance, as does the compulsory collection of census data, and the computerising of personal details in hospitals, schools and government offices. All these forms have the capacity, and, therefore, carry the threat, of continuous, invisible, de-individualised surveillance, and so are components of the disciplinary mechanisms of panopticism in our present society.

The principles of the Panopticon can also be applied to many institutions and government instrumentalities. Two major panoptic institutions within many modern societies are the democratic governmental system and the judicial or legal system.

The power of panoptic discipline exercised by these institutions is often hidden behind very positive ideals, so many people in society imagine those institutions as centres of absolute impartial justice and of fair and equitable government. For example, in the imagination of many ordinary citizens in Australia, the justice system is seen as the means through which the individual can be defended and his or her rights to truth and justice protected. The law and its processes are imagined to be impartial so that the truth is arrived at without prejudice. This imagination is backed by the Westminster model of government characterised by a judiciary which is declared independent of the political process; trial by jury where the accused is tried by a group of peers; and the processes of common law where the laws are not formally written but based on usage, custom and prior judicial decisions. The belief that the law is innocently based on some eternal principle of right and wrong, and the assumption that justice will always find out the guilty, are often unquestioned powers and virtues attributed to the judicial system.

But according to the Foucauldian model, juxtaposed to these imagined ideals is the reality of the panoptic with its dispersion of power and its corruption of any movement towards a utopian ideal. Foucault elaborates on the blending of the democratic and the judicial principles with panoptic discipline when he writes that the modern judicial system “guaranteed a system of rights that were egalitarian in principle,” but were also

supported by these tiny, everyday, physical mechanisms, by all those systems of micro-power that are essentially non-egalitarian and asymmetrical that we call the disciplines. And, although, in a formal way, the representative regime makes it possible, directly or indirectly, with or without relays, for the will of all to form the fundamental authority of sovereignty, the disciplines provide, at the base, a guarantee of the submission of forces and bodies. The real, corporal disciplines constituted the foundation of the formal, judicial liberties. The contract may have been regarded as the ideal foundation of law and political power; panopticism constituted the technique, universally widespread, of coercion. (222)

Foucault describes panopticism as a counter-law, for it is non-egalitarian and fixes power on the upper side of the chain of command (those who occupy the sites which observe), generally subordinating the lower ranks (the many who are the objects or subjects of the discipline). Foucault describes the differential in the relations between the supervised and the supervisor as characterised by “the non-reversible subordination of one group of people by another, the ‘surplus’ power that is always fixed on the same side, the inequality of position of different ‘partners’ in relation to the common regulation” (*Discipline*, 222-23).

The juridical structures of society, then, are panoptic and aimed at discipline rather than impartiality, being built around the concept of surveillance (the need for evidence and witnesses) and examination (both friendly and cross-examination). They are also built on the internalising of guilt so that the desired result is self-reform in the individual who feels the powers which control the institutions of society are always watching him or her. Self-reform is possible because of society’s belief that the small techniques of discipline, mentioned above, are “the humble, but concrete form of every morality, whereas they are a set of physico-political techniques” (Foucault, 223). An open, panoptic society only works smoothly if the citizens act guilty, and do not continually stand on their “rights” which would immediately bring society and its discipline to a standstill.<sup>47</sup>

Similarly, the difference between the ideal democratic vision and the accepted “morality” of the “small techniques of discipline” is demonstrated in that Australia’s government is not a participatory democracy, but a representative democracy. The person on the street can vote, indeed must vote, to elect parliamentary representatives every election, but each person only has a small voice, and beyond voting he or she has little other input into the political system. Besides the occasional opportunity to vote, the average citizen does not participate directly in the government of the nation, but rather is limited to dealing with a plethora of cumbersome government and bureaucratic offices: tax department,

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<sup>47</sup> These issues are taken up by Hasluck-the-writer in his later novels such as *The Bellarmine Jug*, *The Blossville File*, and *A Grain of Truth*.



water board, police department, public hospital, post offices, and public welfare agencies. Such government instrumentalities are not democratic institutions but, instead, operate panoptically, for they divide, control and survey the public whom they serve. The dynamic relationship between these government agencies and the individual places most of the authority and influence on the side of the agencies, so that they can, at times, crush an individual through their superior power. As Paul Hirst, in *Representative Democracy and its Limits*, states, one of the major problems with present democratic societies is that “forms of representative democracy deliver very low levels of governmental accountability and public influence on decision making” (2). In fact, he claims, that the modern style of “representative democracy has predominantly functioned as a means of legitimating government powers . . .” (3). Thus the citizen of Australia, for example, far from actively participating in and influencing political matters, is made into a subject by the multiple disciplines of the “democratic” government institutions.

However, the relationship between the citizen and the institutions of justice and the political democratic system of government is one of interdependence, for the government institutions must have subjectivised citizens in order to govern, and the citizen must be defined and recognised by the government apparatuses in order to have the identity, security and privileges of a citizen. In Foucault’s terms, the relationship of panoptic government institutions and the positioning and responses of the individual citizen (and groups of citizens) is never entirely negative or one-sided, but interactive and fluid so that it constitutes an ever-changing relationship of power and knowledge. This relationship, however, is weighted heavily in favour of the institutions rather than the individual. This is true for many governmental apparatuses which support democracy.

The ability of the panoptic system to readily adapt itself to the conditions of almost any governmental style, especially democracy, has often been unacknowledged in the West’s writings about itself. The characteristics of panopticism, such as the disciplining of society through surveillance and the training of the individual, are often associated with totalitarian forms of government rather than with Western

democracy. But, Paul Hirst argues, it is the very peacefulness of modern, Western institutions which allows the panoptic to be perceived in an identifiable form.

Only with the social pacification and depoliticisation effected by state policies of religious conformity and religious toleration could civil society come to appear positive and the modern concept of it emerge. When that happened, the absolutist state, separated from and unaccountable to civil society, came to be seen as a source of evil. . . . This logic is possible only when the critic perceives there to be no pressing enemies without and no danger of civil strife within; the *state* is the main enemy and the main source of civil strife. (*Representative*, 17-18)

Reading the daily newspapers in Australia quickly reinforces Hirst's observation that the main enemy of the average Australian is the apparatus of the state.

Furthermore, the sheer size of the economies of "democratic" Western nations means an inevitable increase in panoptic tendencies and a decrease in individual freedoms. It is this trend Hirst has in mind when he asserts that with the increase of big government and the panoptic features of modern society

it would be difficult . . . to claim that there can be any 'inalienable' rights for the individual in the strict sense, since the necessities of economic management, public health, social welfare and social control make the degree of regulation of individuals a matter of policy debate and public convenience. (*Representative*, 29-30)

It is these same arguments which are used in Hasluck's *The Hand That Feeds You* to satirically expose the panopticism of Australian democracy, and the extensive and multifarious system through which its citizens are disciplined.

### ***The Hand That Feeds You***

In *The Hand That Feeds You*, much of the discipline within Australian society is from an anonymous central power, the unseen state, which is constructed as the enemy to be targeted by the satire. The regulations the central power generates are enforced by the general population through internalised discipline and through suspicion of each other, for many regulations are covered by counter regulations

which seek to maintain the surveillance of each individual by other individuals. The title of the book itself alludes to the controlling hand of the government, and it is a metaphor which conjures images of both power and detachment. "The hand that feeds you" invokes the imagery of a zoo-keeper who looks after caged beasts, an animal lover who cares for a domestic pet such as a dog, or a society person who provides for a well-kept playboy or mistress. It indicates a relationship of submission and authority, of nurture and power. It also implies a discipline in that the hand that feeds you also has the potential to be the hand which does not feed you. Food – and for the dependent the very act of being fed – is necessary for survival, so "the hand" appears to have the power of ultimate sanction, of deciding the issue of life and death. It is important for Australians, then, as the well-known proverb states, not to bite the hand that feeds them. Nowhere in the novel, however, is "the hand" given a specific identity and location. It remains a powerful symbol unattached to any one identifiable body. As the narrator observes:

There was no dictator to be overthrown, no focal point for an uprising.

The villains were envy and inertia. The encroachments upon the spirit were so gradual, the process of decay so inconspicuous . . . . (166)

In *The Hand That Feeds You*, although the power behind Australian society remains faceless, unnamed, and dispersed, the influence of its ideology and the power of its sanctions are felt throughout the whole community at every level and in every location. There is no sanctuary exempt from its effects.

The historical development of the faceless form of political power in Australia is alluded to by J.B. Hirst in *The Strange Birth of Colonial Democracy*. He argues that the centralisation of power to the state capitals in pre-Federation parliaments, and the weakening of local government, meant that, in Australia, authority

became more formal and impersonal. The British habit of obedience to authority was maintained, but authority was no longer embodied in leading local figures such as the magistrates or acknowledged by deference to a ruling class. Australians gained their sense of freedom by making authority anonymous. (265)

This centralisation, which has remained a strong characteristic of Australian politics, has meant that authority in Australia appears to be somewhat removed from the everyday lives of ordinary people. In *The Hand That Feeds You*, however, the effectual use of the all-pervasive panoptic discipline means that an absolute controlling form of unseen political power is insidiously entwined in the lives of all Australians. This political power, like so much power in Australia today, is not necessarily that of the democratically elected politicians, but is esoteric and dispersed, being largely internalised by the population.

Unquestionably, the most important aspect of the governmental panopticon in the Australia of the future is the social welfare complex. Through this system, which, in *The Hand That Feeds You*, is taken to absurd lengths, surveillance is pursued through the constant need for applications and submissions for subsidies and allowances. The accepted belief is that fraudulent claiming of benefits is widespread, and Dee's housekeeper maintains that "these days, everyone is up to something in one way or another" (20). In the futuristic Australia, the prevailing ease of rorting the social welfare system is both the reason why surveillance is maintained and the explanation why everyone is making constant applications for new and resourceful schemes.

The conditions of perpetual, hostile surveillance in *The Hand That Feeds You* push to an absurd conclusion the social implications of what is happening in a hidden way in Australia today. Currently, for example, concern about social security rorting is behind the government's push for parallel datamatching programs. Since the introduction of the tax file number in Australia, the possibilities of surveillance have dramatically increased. John Birmingham, in "Nowhere to Hide," quotes Roger Clarke, a reader in information systems at the Australian National University, as describing data-matching as

an exercise in mass surveillance. It involves vast quantities of data about vast numbers of people being arbitrarily trawled through . . . . The express intent of this activity is to generate suspicion. Inconsistency between data collections of different agencies is treated as *prima facie* evidence that an

error has occurred, or that a misdemeanour or fraud has been committed.

(47)

Birmingham sees this unlegislated intrusion on the lives of Australian citizens as being based on false premises, as the projected amounts of fraud have not been uncovered. However, while the reasons for the use of such encroachment on individual rights have not been validated, Birmingham claims that there will be a marked growth in this hidden, systematic, mass surveillance through data-matching. It has no loci and no recognisable identity. As Birmingham describes it, the so-called democratic institutions of Australian life set their own agenda, entering people's lives before any suspicion surfaces, without a warrant and without consent.<sup>48</sup> Such intrusions create an atmosphere of implied guilt, even when no offences have taken place. Surveillance of this nature is an accepted fact of life in *The Hand That Feeds You*.

The discipline maintained through the auspices of the social welfare system in *The Hand That Feeds You* keeps the population dependent on the government's resources, and aims to create Foucault's ideal subject of a docile body. As the authorities reason in regard to Roger's application for a Partial Martial benefit, an applicant who fought so hard through the proper channels "was unlikely to take advantage of the system and, so long as he continued to receive his benefits, would, undoubtedly, not voice any criticisms of the Department or its methods" (48). The desperate desire of people to gain and maintain a benefit is shown through Roger's belief that one of the worst things a person could do is to die on the wrong benefit and so make it more difficult for those still alive to receive the same allowance.

Ironically, when the protagonist, Dee, shows some honesty about his ineligibility for government handouts, his Adviser threatens to stamp his papers with the initials S.C.A.B.<sup>49</sup> Angrily the Adviser states,

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<sup>48</sup> In 1995, Birmingham quotes Clarke as claiming some 35,000 people have been sent intimidating letters without any grounds for further action. He states, "Close to 90 per cent of the suspicions the PDMP [parallel data-matching programs] generates prove to be unfounded or trivial" (47).

<sup>49</sup> See explanation of S.C.A.B. in Chapter Three.

“The question, my young friend, is not whether you have dependents or whether you are healthy. The question is – are you going to stand outside the system? Do you wish to cause resentment, even violence, by standing apart, or are you prepared to keep society on an even keel by joining in with the rest of us, by applying for an equalising spoonful of the gravy?”  
(136-37)

The system works on a “whistle-blower” mentality, on the maintenance of high levels of implied guilt, and on the exploitation of individual greed through the common desire to get maximum benefits from the hand of the government, regardless of the cost to the lives of others.

In a moment of nightmarish humour, the extent of the panoptic influence is satirised in the discipline at the nudist beach. In his first encounter with the rules which enforce nudity on the beach, Dee finds he has become an embarrassing curiosity with his pale buttocks and his “recalcitrant member” breaking the unwritten code of no erections. He is relieved to get clear of the beach with its perpetual gaze and unrealistic rules. Nudist beaches, which were fought for by people opposed to the Victorian morals of society at large, have in the recent past been battle grounds for issues of personal freedom.<sup>50</sup> But, in the Australia of the future, the evil of the enforcement of freedom is shown in its absurdity, for the nudist beaches have become places where personal freedom is lost to draconian laws which demand nudity.

Hasluck-the-writer also satirises the power and pervasive presence the panoptic in other locations such as the Australian Trade Unions (ATU). The ATU features prominently in the novel as a site of panoptic power which seeks to control and maintain a tight surveillance on all Australian workers. Other sites of power include the education department where students are taught how to apply for avoidance schemes instead of learning sport (19). So complex and dispersed are the power relations in the Australia of the future that people need to hire an Adviser to recommend for them an appropriate mix of subsidies, avoidance schemes and rorts.

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<sup>50</sup> See reference to the nudist beach in Chapter Three.

The Advisers have power, and empower others, through their knowledge of the multiple discourses of the panoptic system.

The faceless panoptic is so deeply ingrained into the Australia of the future that Dee senses it as he drives through Sydney in the back of a taxi. Little has outwardly changed from the Sydney he remembers, but behind the blank glittering windows of the multistorey buildings he senses an emerging horror. That horror, he explains,

reveals itself to us most forcibly when we stumble upon it, when we catch a glimpse of something intruding upon the corner of the tranquil landscape. The creaking gate swings open and there at the end of the dappled path beneath the trees, there in the deep shadow, something is emerging, something with a cold presence and a face streaked by lichen is coming out at us, rooting through the undergrowth with a slow and shambling gait, but still coming. And looking back we realise there has been a stirring in this vicinity for days, or weeks, or even years, and we wonder how we were persuaded to ignore the signs. . . . If the roof-tops were lifted for a moment, what would be exposed? Would some leprous tentacle come probing its way out into the sunlight, paralysing spectators with fear of the unknown? (62)

In Hasluck's "satiric nightmare," the panoptic which arose from society's desire to rid itself of the plague, has itself become a plague on Australian society. It is this plague of the panoptic, with its French-Foucault and British-Bentham connections, which provides what Hasluck-the-critic calls "a haunting presence" in his last three novels.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> See Rosemary Sorensen's interview with Hasluck, "The Anarchy at the Core," 18.

## Chapter 7

**Inventing Worlds: Foucault and *France Australe***

*The bay is dozing.  
 Somewhere in its sleep  
 are dreams of islands  
 yet to be discovered;  
 continents  
 scarcely imagined.*  
 (from "Rottnest Island," 72)

Following on from *The Bellarmine Jug* and *Truant State*, which were examined through the construct of historiographic metafiction in Chapter Five, Hasluck's latest three novels, *The Country Without Music*, *The Blossville File* and *A Grain of Truth*, share an even more complex historiographic component based on a counter-history to that of Australia's official European history. The intricate, hypothetical postmodern components of these novels effectively differentiate them from all his earlier work, and demonstrate, once again, both the relevance and the complexity of reading within the framework of the movement from modernism to postmodernism.

The three most recent novels are located in an imaginary setting on the Western Australian coast, but, in contrast to the orthodox history of Australia, the settlement of the fictional country is French rather than British. Furthermore, on one of the offshore islands stands an imposing prison based on Bentham's Panopticon. With his Panopticon, Bentham had sought to imagine a new, more humane penal institution which would replace the harsh realities of the penal settlement of New South Wales. Ironically, although Bentham's Panopticon was never built in Australia, his imaginary penal system was partly fulfilled in that New South Wales did progress from a settlement which punished prisoners through isolation, to a colony which, through surveillance and the discipline of work,



sought to reform the convicts into useful citizens.<sup>52</sup> According to John Hirst, in “The Australian Experience,” the “whole enterprise of founding a convict colony signalled the growth in government capacity and reach, of which Bentham was a prophet and instructor” (275).

Just as Bentham imagined a new penal system, so Hasluck, as a novelist, has imagined a different kind of settlement for the western seaboard of Australia. In an extended metaphor, these works play with and parody Western Australia’s history. As explained about historiographic metafiction in Chapter Five, the difference between the project of the historian and the novelist is a matter of emphasis. Hirst, the historian, for example, when writing about the battle for democracy in Australia, fought between the liberals and the land-owning conservatives, describes how it was a struggle between conflicting, chimerical images, rather than a contest for concrete realities. According to Hirst, Henry Parkes, “the father of Federation,” created an image of a democratic England to help fight for democracy in New South Wales. It was a phantom, states Hirst, but effective.

The Britain which Parkes created – voracious for reform – was a phantom. The signs of reform, though not the substance, had been present in the early fifties and now there were not even the signs. However, Parkes had worked wonders with the signs, and in a colonial society they became more important than substance. Colonists cannot share the complexity and variety of immediate experience in the mother country; the place which remains so important for them becomes a collection of images which they continuously recreate themselves. The conservatives held up one image – the glorious constitution of our fatherland – and Parkes eclipsed it with another. (*Strange Birth*, 57)

These powerful historical illusions solidified the course of Australia’s history as it moved towards Federation. Hasluck-the-writer’s imaginary worlds about Western Australia, in an active, postmodern sense, both challenge the state’s illusory ideals

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<sup>52</sup> In fact, Bentham’s Panopticon was never put into effect, even though land was purchased on the banks of the Thames at Millbank for the purpose (see *Works* Vol. 11, 101-102). Ironically, although parliament passed the necessary legislation, the king vetoed the project at the last moment, and Bentham died a disappointed man.

and present it with new, correspondingly illusory, possibilities and perspectives. Through the imaginative space he formulates, he explores questions of an ontological nature about Australia and its place in the world.

According to Brian McHale, in *Postmodernist Fiction*, ontological questions, which raise issues about *being* rather than *knowledge*, are the kind of questions posed by postmodernism. Indeed, the difference between modernism and postmodernism, argues McHale, can be characterised by the kind of questions asked. On the one hand, McHale argues, “the dominant of modernist fiction is *epistemological*,” demonstrated through the questions asked, such as:

What is there to be known?; Who knows it?; How do they know it, and with what degree of certainty?; How is knowledge transmitted from one knower to another, and with what degree of reliability?; How does the object of knowledge change as it passes from knower to knower?; What are the limits of the knowable? And so on. (9)

Modernism, with its epistemological emphasis, problematises the knower and the knowable. Epistemological questions are constantly being raised in all of Hasluck’s texts, for they are concerned with the way knowledge is produced, remembered and transmitted. *Quarantine*, for example, raises epistemological questions about who knows and controls the truth, what truth is knowable and what knowledge is reliable.

On the other hand, McHale theorises that “the dominant of postmodernist fiction is *ontological*,” for it raises questions on the ontologies of both the literary text and of the worlds projected through it. The typical questions include:

What is a world?; What kinds of worlds are there, how are they constituted, and how do they differ?; What happens when different kinds of worlds are placed in confrontation, or when boundaries between worlds are violated?; What is the mode of existence of a text, and what is the mode of existence of the world (or worlds) it projects?; How is a projected world structured? And so on. (10)

The postmodern, then, problematises and questions not just the knowable but also the imagined, or fictional, possibilities through which our existence can be framed.

In like manner, through writing his novels, Eco discovered

that a novel has nothing to do with words in the first instance. Writing a novel is a cosmological matter, like the story told by Genesis (we all have to choose our role models, as Woody Allen puts it). (20)

The author, asserts Eco, must “grasp the subject, and the words will follow” (24). He goes on to venture, “The constructed world will then tell us how the story must proceed” (27). The privileging of the “living” world of the novel over the knowledge it makes known and sets out to explore is a part of the postmodern phenomenon. Postmodern fiction, then, does not aspire to tell the truth, but questions and problematises the representation of truth as it is narrated. As Hutcheon puts it when discussing the problem of the recognition of historical “facts” in postmodernism:

Facts are not given but constructed by the kinds of questions we ask of events. . . . What postmodern discourses – fictive and historiographic – ask is: how do we know and come to terms with such a complex ‘thing’? (123)

Postmodernism, then, contests the ground of validation.

Hasluck’s satire, *The Hand That Feeds You*, asks such questions, probing into the truth about the nature of Australian society and the type of social and political world we wish to have in the future. To some degree *The Bellarmine Jug* not only asks epistemological questions about nationalism, colonisation and international law, but also creates its own world with its own ontology. With that world it raises questions such as, “What is the nature of the Western world?”, and “What does the collision and collusion of the Eastern and Western worlds produce?” Similarly, the questions raised through the created world in Hasluck’s later novels are predominantly postmodern questions. “What is a colonised world? What kinds of worlds are there, how are they constituted, and how do they differ? What happens when different kinds of worlds are placed in confrontation, or when boundaries

between worlds, both real and imagined, are violated?" It is these postmodern questions which are explored in Hasluck's speculative novels.

### **Invented Worlds: The French Connection**

Through the imaginary worlds constructed in his latest three novels, Hasluck-the-writer questions many of the assumptions which are held about the "worlds" of Australia and Western Australia. The regional location is the Western Australian coast, and the worlds commingled, sometimes with a gentle concurrence and sometimes with a violent collision, are the colonial worlds of the French and the British. To establish the authenticity of the novelistic space, Hasluck-the-writer develops imaginary, national discourses to which the characters respond. In a powerful metaphor, the three novels are immersed into a landscape and milieu whose dimensions are an amalgam of French and Anglo-Australian colonial discourses. They are partially anchored in the "what if" hypothesis. What if the French had colonised Western Australia? This hypothesis has a modicum of historical validity in that the French, believing in colonisation by proclamation, claimed Western Australia a colony of France on the morning of 30 March 1772, two years after James Cook proclaimed British sovereignty over the east coast of Australia, and sixteen years before the First Settlement at Botany Bay. Of course the establishment of a colony was much more significant than a mere proclamation, and as Leslie Marchant observes, in *France Australe*, "the French proclamation of annexation of western (sic) Australia ended up as a scrap of paper, once the British decided to dispatch a garrison to King George Sound in 1826, and to support this act with power" (5). Thus the French colonisation of Western Australia was a reality in terms of imaginative dreams rather than through physical presence.

In the historical context of Hasluck's three novels, however, the French were able to established a physical presence on the Western Australian mainland, as well as on two fictional off-shore islands, before the British colony had a chance to expand. Over time, however, the French mainland settlement had been subsumed into the British colony, but the islands had maintained their independence and

allegiance to France, and their history extends from the time of the French Revolution, through the French Indo-Chinese wars and into the present generation. French culture, mixed with Creole and indigenous customs, characterises this imaginary country.

However, beyond the immediate fascination the imaginative fictions create through their tampering with history and their development of the antipodean French island colony, the texts are exploring something of the heart of what it means to be Western Australian. As Patrick O'Brien asserts,

the basis of Western Australian exceptionalism lies in the tension between its island-like situation (more isolated than New Zealand from the main centres of Australian population) and the fact that it has been denied its separateness because of its geographical and political connections with the rest of Australia. ("Western Values," 47)

This same tension, between its island nature and its conflicting desires to be connected to, or disconnected from, the mainland, is the main tension in the French colony. In another similarity with Western Australia, an atmosphere of subterranean dishonesty pervades the life of the island people in the three novels. Dorothy Hewett, in her love-hate relationship with Western Australia, describes a "corrupt innocence" about the sun-drenched, isolated state (quoted by Brady in "Place, Taste," 109). This characteristic has certainly been reinforced in recent times with the WA Inc era of the 1980s, and the many sagas involving local councils in Perth being dragged into the criminal courts. Each of these features of Western Australia is a key theme which permeates Hasluck's imaginative novels.

The world Hasluck-the-writer constructs of French settlement on the Western Australian coast, is, of course, a fabrication. However, in line with the historiographic metafiction of his earlier novels, Hasluck continues to use a mixture of factual and fictional elements. These "facts" are based on Western Australia, but also include historical and social fragments from the French Revolution and geographical and climatic elements from New Caledonia and other

locations, the sources of which he elaborates on in "The Antipodean Panoptique."<sup>53</sup> The fictional city on the mainland, Blosseville, is named after the real Jules Blosseville, a French navigator and intellectual who "was asked by the Director General of Police, to prepare a plan for establishing a penal colony at the Swan River" (Marchant, 230). According to Marchant, Blosseville actually made two well-informed reports in 1826 which recommended the annexation of the south-west of Western Australia and the establishment of a capital at King George Sound. Britain learnt of France's aspirations and quickly sent Major Lockyer to King George Sound to raise the English ensign. The location of the imaginary city of Blosseville, and port of St Allouarn, however, is subtropical and more in keeping with the conditions and climate of New Caledonia than the Swan River or King George Sound. In fact, Hasluck-the-critic describes how Hasluck-the-writer-to-be, visiting Noumea in New Caledonia, "with its shuttered windows, peeling verandahs and atmosphere of tropical decay . . . knew immediately that, climatically, [he] would move the fictional islands to a subtropical zone well to the north of Rottneest" ("Antipodean Panoptique," 55). Hasluck-the-writer, then, locates the imaginary city on Turtle Cove (*Country Without Music*, 71), a similar place to Turtle Bay which is recorded by Marchant as the location of the 1772 proclamation of Comte de St Allouarn, when he claimed Australia for the French King (64).<sup>54</sup> Turtle Bay is on Dirk Hartog Island in the Shark Bay area of Western Australia, just south of the Tropic of Capricorn, while New Caledonia, off the eastern seaboard of Australia, is just north of the Tropic of Capricorn. It appears, St Allouarn's landfall provides a helpful coincidence for Hasluck's novel.

Blosseville, St Allouarn and the islands are set on the fictional *Baie de Baudin*, named after Thomas Baudin who led French expeditions to Western Australia in 1801 and 1803. In real life, however, Baudin was inept in relating to those under

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<sup>53</sup> For the historical and political developments of the French Revolution see Simon Schama's *Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution* and for the social and political aspects see Lynn Hunt's *Politics, Culture and Class in the French Revolution*.

<sup>54</sup> Recently, a bottle, which is thought to contain the written proclamation of St Allouarn, has been found at Turtle Island (see Carmelo Amalfi's articles "Bawl Over Who Keeps Rare Coin," and "Coin Tosses Up an Adventurous Tale" in the *West Australian*, 24 January 1998).

his charge, and as an unpopular commander had no site on the Western Australian coast named after him (Marchant, 115). Furthermore, in *The Country Without Music*, the main port is named after the historical figure of St Allouarn, but on Western Australia's actual coastline the only geographical feature to bear his name is a rocky outcrop off Cape Leeuwin (Marchant, 90). The names of the two islands in the novels are based on fictional characters – the poorer island with a salt mine (like Rottneest) named Dupuis after Claude Dupuis, a journalist and prison reformer who died in the French Revolution, and the richer flax-growing island (like New Caledonia) called Gournay after Louis Gournay, a French scholar and bureaucrat who was responsible for interpreting the works of Dupuis. Claude Dupuis and Louis Gournay had become cult figures on the imaginary islands.

### ***The Country Without Music***

The first of the trilogy, *The Country Without Music*, begins its narrative with a group of briefcase-carrying Australian businessmen being given a tour of Gournay. They are specifically taken by their host to visit the ruins of the *Centre Pénitentiaire de Gournay* which resembles the horrific prisons of the British penal colonies in the antipodes. The prison, and the cemetery nearby, were marked with the epitaph, "To their brothers who died in exile" (21).<sup>55</sup> Like the convicts transported to New South Wales, most of those who landed on Gournay were never to return to the mother country. Historian, Patricia O'Brien, claims that transportation to the French penal colonies was particularly harsh, and

some observers felt that the severity of the punishment, which resulted in the deaths of thousands of men and women in the penal colonies of New Caledonia and French Guyana, was tantamount to extermination. ("The Prison on the Continent," 212)

Furthermore, O'Brien quotes French penal reformer and critic, Rene Berenger, describing the transportation of prisoners to the colonies as "the bloodless guillotine" (212).

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<sup>55</sup> See also *The Country Without Music*, page 49.

Unaware of this history, so similar to the Australian eastern seaboard, the businessmen in the novel approach the prison ruins. As Jacqueline, their Creole guide, observes them, she realises that the Australians did not

suspect that what they were about to see was the thing which had brought me, and people like me such as the Ilois into existence. Gournay and Dupuis, the two largest islands . . . weren't just names on a map. At one time they were known as the strangest penal colony on the face of the earth, and people from the mainland, *Grande Terre* as we called it, were often inclined to say that the strangest part of our past lived on, in us – and we in it. (6)

Through the inhabitants of the fictional French settlement, then, Hasluck-the-writer is able to develop an hybrid culture with a penal history which is both similar yet alien to the Australian heritage.

In contrast to Gournay's prison, on the sister island of Dupuis stands the imposing structure of the *Panoptique*, a prison with a different ideology of reform, modelled on Bentham's Panopticon. In the novel it is a descriptive site which allows Hasluck-the-writer to draw together the contrasting influences of French and British colonial experience. It also allows him to take the ideas of French theorist, Michel Foucault, out of their French context and plant them in an imaginary antipodean world, thus exploring their effects within an experimental literary context. This provides a ficto-critical element through which Foucaudian ideas can be explored in an Australian setting, rather than in the more sterile academic, institutional framework in which theory is commonly debated. As Hasluck-the-critic writes:

In the real world, questions about the meaning of events have to be resolved in a lawyer-like or scholastic way, and large issues are often lost sight of while discussion bogs down in controversies about facts and evidence. In a work of fiction questions can be answered according to the author's whim, and in a way which underlines the theme.



By creating a fictional realm where the facts are beyond dispute, one has greater freedom to explore the tantalising question that Australian writers have often posed: what sort of country do you make out of European visions and bureaucracies? (“Antipodean Panoptique,” 59)

Such questions underscore the postmodern nature of this novel in which the confluence of the French and English theories of Foucault and Bentham, and the different French and British colonial experiences overlay the fictional interaction of the French and British histories. What if, Hasluck-the-writer seems to be asking, Foucault’s history of the development of prisons and a disciplined society, which is framed on Bentham’s model of the Panopticon, had actually been implemented in the colonies of the southern seas?

The inquiring world of Hasluck’s novels has not come into being in a vacuum, for as a writer he is well aware of the intertexts of the theoretical, cultural and social ambiguities at work in the writings of Bentham and Foucault. In “The Antipodean Panoptique,” Hasluck-the-critic acknowledges their works are a part of Hasluck-the-writer’s motivation in writing the novel, and he finds it

fascinating to contemplate the possibility of not only that a penal colony might have been established on our shores . . . but also that the nature of the establishment, and the unusual community brought into existence as a consequence, might have contained features which are at the very centre of twentieth century concerns. . . .

[So] I decided to write a piece which would test the boundaries between fact and fiction, and bring panopticism under notice. (50).

In the speculative, historical account of the trilogy, the man who is instrumental in developing the ideas behind the *Panoptique* is the fictional Claude Dupuis. Dupuis formulated his concepts during the bloody Terror of the French Revolution. His *Panoptique* “is governed by two motives – fear of pain and desire for pleasure . . . [that is] the pain and pleasure principle” (*Country Without Music*, 53). To Dupuis, who is characterised as an austere man lacking in compassion, the ultimate pain is being disciplined or tortured to death, while the greatest pleasure is the joy of

survival and release from discipline. According to his reasoning then, the guillotine brought the pain of death, but also the pleasure of a quick, humane and egalitarian end, for it dispatches rich and poor with equal, painless haste. Dupuis, however, could not control everything about the *Panoptique*, for, in *The Country Without Music*, there is one pleasure which can invade and strongly affect the *Panoptique*, and yet evade its discipline. It is the pleasure of music and the worlds it conjures. The discipline of the *Panoptique* is reinforced through music, for it has an elevating, reformatory effect on the inmates and warders when it is played on the centre dais of the *Panoptique* (or the Temple of Reason as it is euphemistically called in the jargon of the French Revolution). But the mystical influence of music is dissident in that it creates another imaginary world to which the listeners can escape, even if only momentarily, thus short-circuiting the disciplinary process.

In *The Country Without Music*, the inevitable dichotomy of discipline and dissidence is illustrated in a section entitled “Panoptique” (111-17). In the narrative’s synthesised world, at a time when the *Panoptique* on Dupuis is filled with prisoners, a poor, local violinist quietly, tentatively, takes the centre stand in the Temple of Reason, the central hall in the house of correction. The lonely music begins in the darkness of the circular auditorium. All is closed and sombre. Then, slowly, one by one the hatches of the cells which ascend in rows around the rostrum open up, letting the light stream into the hall. The musician breaks into the popular, dissident Creole tune *Shu fais la*, or “Hey, whatcha doing?” and he senses that a “new land is being summoned up, a realm which was hidden until now; fragile, invisible, concealed in the stale air.” As the music soars, the question is posed: “What will happen when you lower the fiddle? Where will the country you created go?” (117). Like the musician, Hasluck-the-writer, too, has created a country through which to interrogate and illuminate issues of history, colonisation, regionalism and nationalism. Through his playing with regional issues and histories, and his disruption of conventions through postmodern literary devices, Hasluck echoes a dissident refrain. *Shu fais la*, “Hey! Whatcha doing?” But when the music stops, when the book is read, has anything changed? Although the shutters may go down, making the Temple of Reason dark again, the memory of

the clear, strident notes lingers on, for the entire place has been disturbed in some small reverberating way, and the margins, the regional, have been felt and heard. No conclusions have been supplied. In this postmodern milieu of heightened sensibility, a new self-awareness can resonate, and through the affirming yet disturbing self-awareness it is hoped that a modicum of change can be achieved. Here, as with many postmodern narratives, the ontological questions are asked about the creation of worlds, but no answers are given.

Music is an important theme in *The Country Without Music*. Music is projected as playing a central role in the defining of communities of people, creating national identities and providing a medium for rebellion and difference. At the very beginning of the novel is a quote from Shakespeare:

The man that hath no music in himself,  
nor is not mov'd with concord of sweet sounds,  
is fit for treasons, stratagems and spoils . . . (v)

In many ways the novel is full of treasons, stratagems and political spoils, for the island country has no anthem, and, therefore, the inhabitants lack a sense of identity. The Creole dissidents, quoting Dupuis, believe that “unless we write an anthem . . . the future will be a country without music” (56). The closest tune the islanders have to an anthem is the frivolous *Shu fais la* (not unlike Australia’s popular, defacto anthem of “Waltzing Matilda”). The islanders’ Creole music, which is despised by the more educated French, is a foot-tapping pot-pourri, “a farrago of blues and *chansons condamnés*” (31), which is all things: “trivial . . . profound . . . meant nothing . . . meant everything” (32) .

Furthermore, whenever the Creole islanders played the “Marseillaise” on their improvised instruments, they did it in a deliberately subversive way:

The French national anthem was never played seriously on Gournay, only as a warming up sound, a kind of mockery, a wink and a nudge to local people. ‘The players are pretending to be well-behaved,’ the tune said to those within earshot, ‘but you know better. *Le jour de gloire est un mirage*’ (32)

The use to which music is put, then, is cyclic, for just as the islanders parody the “Marseillaise” as an act of rebellion, so the origin of the “Marseillaise” itself was as a revolutionary song. In his account of the French Revolution, Simon Schama boldly asserts that

nothing like the “Marseillaise” has ever been written that comes so near to expressing the comradeship of citizens in arms and nothing ever will.

All the great themes of the Revolution – family, blood, soil – are given their voice. (*Citizen*, 598)

A strident note, then, is sounded in *The Country Without Music*, and it asserts that the influence of songs may come and go, but the disruptive power of music remains.

The power of music is dramatically shown as history is reconstructed in *The Country Without Music* to allow the composer of the “Marseillaise,” the inventor of the instrument of terror, Dr Guillotine, and the promoter of the *Panoptique*, Claude Dupuis, to meet together at a lecture given by Dupuis. As Dupuis enthusiastically expounds on the marvels of his panoptic prison system, which is to reform wayward malcontents in a Temple of Reason, the composer weeps copiously. Dr Guillotine physically forces the composer to remain in his seat, to listen to the reformer’s barbaric diatribe. Dupuis, the architect of society, has no time for the sentiment of an emotional musician, and the difference between the worlds of the free, transforming power of music and the strict manipulation of the panoptic system proposed by Dupuis is starkly contrasted. With the passage of time, a reversal occurs, as the music of the “Marseillaise” outlasts the terror of the guillotine and the dominance of the *Panoptique* in the penal system. Nevertheless, in the novelistic space constructed by the rewriting of the history of the French Revolution and of Western Australia, the ominous sceptres of the *Panoptique* and the guillotine loom large. Both these instruments of terror were tools of the authorities, produced out of paranoia and creating paranoia. Opposed to these mechanisms of power which have been reduced to tottering relics thick with rust and crumbling with age, the music, which belongs to an oppressed people,

continues to resonate, creating a country of hope, and in turn provoking paranoia in the ranks of the authorities.

But, perhaps the greatest threat to the disciplined control of the island society is the Carnival. It is

a place where everything got turned upside down and pulled inside out, a saturnalia, a twenty-four hour binge in which sobriety went out the window and the only crime was common-sense. A crazy looking-glass held up to the islanders to remind us of what we may have been once – and might still become. (122)

Foucault sees the Carnival as a breaking out of the severe discipline which surrounds the quarantine mechanism which endeavours to control the plague. “A whole literary fiction of the festival,” writes Foucault,

grew up around the plague: suspended laws, lifted prohibitions, the frenzy of passing time, bodies mingling together without respect, individuals unmasked, abandoning their statutory identity and the figure under which they had been recognised, allowing a quite different truth to appear.

(*Discipline*, 197)

Hasluck-the-writer continues this literary tradition, and through it targets the Australians who are characterised as a dampener on the events of the Carnival. According to Charles Villiers, Gournay’s Administrator, the Australian officials who came over from *Grande Terre* were

[g]ood-humoured folk, but burdened by their Anglo-Saxon heritage and dour insistence upon opening ceremonies and the cutting of ribbons: the demand by their government that announcements be made to a throng. Pedestrian drama I call it – the bureaucratic school of acting; theatre of the moderately absurd. (122)

In fact, it is the Australians’ demand for a “proper suit and tie” ceremony in the midst of the Carnival which gives the dissidents an opportunity to perform their rebellious act of desecration.

For most of the Creole locals, however, the Carnival is a festive night of reversals, when charladies become kings and men dress in the frocks of the long-dead. Papier-mâché faces of Baudin, St Allouarn and Blosseville appear, along with the usual gallery of characters from the Revolution – Robespierre, Marie Antoinette, Louis the Sixteenth, Marat and Charlotte Corday. Normal rules are suspended for a day, and at dusk the effigies of Dupuis and Gournay are lynched. It was at the height of the first Carnival which Charles Villiers attended that Jacqueline was conceived, for in the ribald mayhem, Villiers, dressed as Charlotte Corday, enjoyed a single moment of unguarded passion with Marie Bottineau who was dressed as Louis the Sixteenth. In the light and solemnity of the following day, Villiers felt repelled by his deed, and when Marie gave birth to Jacqueline he refused to marry her, never confessing to the possibility that Jacqueline was his daughter. Marie tormented him for the rest of her short, tragic life. Jacqueline, who inherited the mythical flute of the Bottineau's from her mother, never knew who her father was. Many years later, it was at the Carnival again that Jacqueline smears pig's blood on Villiers' suit, as a political protest, as a signal for the beginning of a rebellion, and the end of Villiers' administration. The Carnival, celebrated in the shadow of the *Panoptique*, is a reversal of all that the panoptic system represents, the ominous threat of the Carnival's mayhem being that it has the power to subvert the history and politics of the nation in ways beyond the control of any of the participants.

In an equally carnivalesque and unintended way, the most lasting influence Dupuis has on this fictional world is not through the *Panoptique* but via a ghostly presence through which the past is retained in the present. Although Dupuis was guillotined in the Terror of the French Revolution, he still continues to cast a shadow over the island realm. The driver of the tumbrel which took Dupuis to his death remarked that "Nothing on earth is ever ended" (22). According to the Ilois, Dupuis can still be seen in "a realm inhabited by shadow, wisps of hope, a place in which a man's desires constitute reality" (23-24). The presence of the past constantly influences the people and events on Gournay and Dupuis, so that even the pragmatic Australians become caught in a web of events linked to the influences of the past.

In the world of *The Country Without Music* no one is exempt from the mystical powers of the island.

Another past which mystically haunts the present in the novel is the stolen flute. While a country without an anthem is a country without identity, so too, the mainland without its mystical flute has become a country without music, and therefore without identity. According to the stories told on Gournay, the small white instrument was initially taken from the indigenous people on the Australian mainland by Lieutenant Bottineau. The French navigator, in his old age and full of shame that he had robbed a country of its music, tried to return the flute to its rightful owners but they would not receive it nor would they forgive him. So the flute remained in his family, passed from generation to generation. The instrument is mystical in that it produces a special kind of silence. Jacqueline explains:

It created a hush which permitted one to see and hear with astonishing clarity. It focused the mind. The natives of *Grande Terre* claimed that they could, by use of such treasured instruments, conjure up a revered landscape. To her ancestor, Lieutenant Bottineau, more remarkable than their mysticism, was the way in which they could detect movements from afar: the flute he brought back with him was a device whereby the inhabitants of the land . . . had managed to refine their sensory perceptions. (78)

The stillness which follows the playing of the flute opens up new dimensions, new spaces for histories and meaning, for the indigenous people of the mainland believe that music captures the essence of their world, and even brings it into being. Thus a country without music, either because it has been stolen or because it has never created its own, is a country without a soul, without intimate, inner perception, without a past and without a future.

Mystical silence, or an altered state engendered by a profound experience, is a constant theme in *The Country Without Music*. The silence opens up unseen worlds. The bone flute Lieutenant Bottineau stole from the indigenous people on the mainland produces such a silence after its shrill note is played. A similar kind

of silence is needed to see the raft birds in the seas off Gournay. It is a silence without emotion in which

one has to become a crag, a pinnacle, a rocky outcrop. A fragment of the landscape staring patiently at the crimson sea, without hope, but without despair, knowing that if the raft-birds wish to be seen, they will appear eventually. (78)

Ironically, Don, the Australian, experiences the mystical silence when Jacqueline blows the flute, but when he tries to do the same he can not produce the proper note. Thus, again, *The Country Without Music* critiques the rational pragmatism of Australians, and opens up a space beyond the controlled, disciplined, rationalism of Western society. The flute and its silence seem to heighten Don's sexual perceptions and his naive, probably deliberate, misreading of the signs leads to his rape of Jacqueline. In this sense the mystical space threatens and alarms the ordered panoptic world of the West, and can lead to further oppression of the subaltern.

Cycles of repression are evident throughout *The Country Without Music*. The indigenous people of the mainland had their music taken from them when their flute was stolen, so, they have become a people in a country without music. The exiles who died on Gournay were political prisoners from the Paris Commune of 1871, and they suffered great cruelty and death as people without a country. The Creoles of Gournay and Dupuis form an underclass of islanders who are oppressed by an administration determined to join the islands politically with the mainland, for the Administrator, and even those servants who have strong connections back in France, formed a sort of colonial overclass. The Creoles are kept in their place as a people in a country without music, without an anthem, and without a future.

Women, too, are oppressed. Marie Bottineau is rejected by the hard-hearted and ambitious Villiers. "One does not owe the truth to one's oppressors," was Marie's catch-cry as she made Villiers pay for his neglect of her. Jacqueline, Marie's daughter, is oppressed through being raped and abused by Ryan. She is also sexually and politically used by the leader of the dissident group before she is



discarded by them. She is estranged from Villiers who relates to her as an uncle rather than as a father, and, finally, she is thrown out of her own home because of her involvement with the public demonstration of the Creole dissidents.

None of the oppressed groups within the novel finds reconciliation or peace. The indigenous people of the mainland refuse to accept Lieutenant Bottineau's attempts to return the flute. Ryan's endeavours to confess his rape of Jacqueline to Villiers is misunderstood and rejected. Marie Bottineau and Charles Villiers never make peace over their differences. The notaries of the novel's historical interludes set in the French Revolution all went to the gallows maintaining their rage at those who oppressed them. Nothing in the imagined world is ever resolved. Life is a tragedy in which everything simply moves on. Such is the open-endedness of the postmodern novel.

As an open-ended, postmodern novel, then, *The Country Without Music* can be read on a number of unrelated, sometimes diametrically opposed, allegorical levels. At one level, Hasluck's country without music could represent the Aboriginal people of Australia. Robbed of their land and culture by the invading Europeans, the Aborigines have lost much of their identity, and any reconciliation is still a wishful thought. Then, in a different sense, all Australians have struggled with their sense of identity, and the nation has been, allegorically, a country without an anthem, and so a country without a future. In a different way again, using Jacqueline's words, Australia can be seen to consist of the two people groups: "the complacent mainland" and "the tragic islands" (56). In the Australian context, these people groups could represent the Australian Europeans and the Australian Aborigines, or Western Australians and the t'othersiders (those from the Eastern States), or, more broadly, the geographically isolated states such as Western Australia and Tasmania and the Federal Government. In the novel, the dualism of such a displacement is part of the postcolonial experience, for the Creole population on Gournay and Dupuis sit unhappily between the British and French worlds, and in their despair they plan a rebellion to initiate a country of their own. They decide to overthrow the government during the mayhem of the

annual Carnival which celebrates the French Revolution. That the rebellion flops is not important for, in the postmodern genre, one future is no better than its alternative.

Furthermore, the contrast between the islanders and the mainlanders in the novel tends to produce a dialectic between the conjured postcolonial French world of the islanders on the one hand, and the British-dominated world of Australia on the other. Thus, Don Ryan, as an archetypal Australian, is ill-at-ease on Gournay and, unknowingly, is mocked by the islanders, including the Administrator, Villiers, who photographs him with his head in an ungainly pose, clamped in the block of the guillotine. Don feigns interest in the story of the settlement of Gournay, and in the history of the flute Jacqueline wears around her neck, but his attention is only a public relations ploy to gain business contracts from Villiers and to get Jacqueline into bed with him. He eventually rapes Jacqueline and is humiliated in his business dealings by the persistent resurgence of the photo of his contorted, flushed face in the embrace of the guillotine. The unease of the Australian businessmen on the island is highlighted by their hesitancy in exploring the prison on Gournay and their eagerness to catch the ferry back to the mainland. The Australians are portrayed as being unaware of what is really happening around them, and as crass business people out to serve their own interests. In this imaginary world, then questions about Australianness, different experiences of colonisation, and issues of oppression and resistance in the antipodes, are explored in ontological terms through such mediums as music and carnival.

In Hasluck's conjured country, however, while many ontological questions about Australia's world are raised and explored, no answers are given. The *Centre Pénitentiaire de Gournay* is in ruins, and by the end of the novel it is being bulldozed to make way for a housing estate. The *Panoptique* on Dupuis is to be turned into a concert hall as, once again, music triumphs over the penal discipline. Through a process of peaceful change the government of the islands has been split, so each island is governed independently, but not in the way the young political agitators wished. The use of the word *Ilois* has become illegal, but Creole

militants, known as Malpois, want to reunite the islands and their fight against the government is sufficiently violent to make some parts of the islands dangerous to travel through. Peace on the islands is still elusive and uneasy. In the “what if” world of the fictional islands, Hasluck-the-writer presents both a hypothetical world and a mirror for Australians to see themselves in, to ask themselves questions about history, injustice, oppression and nationhood.

Thus, *The Country Without Music* provides a world of ideas, myths and legends, giving a detailed account of the geography of the imaginary world, while informing us through constant asides about the fictional history of its people and places of interest. But, for the Hasluck novels, the questions continue, for this same imaginary world which has been constructed in *The Country Without Music* also sets the ontological context for Hasluck’s next two works, *The Blosseville File* and *A Grain of Truth*.

### ***The Blosseville File***

*The Blosseville File* is a novel loosely constructed from short stories set in the former French colony of Blosseville on the mainland of the Western Australian coast. Across the sea from Blosseville can be seen the islands of Gournay and Dupuis, which form the main setting for *The Country Without Music*. The geographical and historical world already established in *The Country Without Music* also forms the backdrop for *The Blosseville File*, and only one of the stories, “The Case for Claude Dupuis,” has the specific purpose of adding to the history of that already-established fictional world. It reads as a well-researched and comprehensive chapter which fills in significant gaps in the reader’s knowledge about the fictitious Claude Dupuis.

The File has been put together by Lucien Chabot, a freelance journalist for whom this collection will be his first publication. Chabot has also spent time working as a court reporter, and a number of the File stories are about court cases very similar to ones which have created considerable interest in Western Australia in recent

times. To some literary critics *The Blosseville File* is a compilation of unrelated, or at best partially connected, stories. Heather Neilson, for example calls it a “stitched-up book” (“Seamy Side,” 20). Admittedly, the stories range over a wide spectrum of themes, contexts, styles, characters and points of view, but the key to this reading of them is in the title itself. Blosseville, the location, forms the link for all these stories.

However, the stories in *The Blosseville File* are not about Blosseville in the same way that *The Country Without Music* is about the imaginary islands of Gournay and Dupuis. *The Blosseville File* is not a “what if” collection of stories, for while *The Country Without Music* sets the imaginary context in place, *The Blosseville File* is best read as a direct satire, of Perth and various aspects of life in Western Australia. Some of the stories, like “The Way to the Airport” and “The Case against the Suburbs,” are homely, though critical, accounts of life in suburbia, which, although pertinent to Perth, could have been set in any city location. Others, such as “Airport and Centrepont” (“Syampu”) and “The Case against Writer’s Week,” are transparently referential, being more specifically aimed at certain institutions in Western Australia, such as the judiciary and the literati. The world which *The Blosseville File* questions is the environment of Perth in the 1980’s.

The literary world is specifically critiqued through the work of the freelance journalist, Chabot. He is struggling to get his collection of papers published, and he vents his frustration on the page, allowing the reader an inside look at the lot of a writer’s life in Australia. Many of the stories are written in the third-person, with Chabot himself being one of the protagonists, and this, along with the constant internal references to the Blosseville file itself, gives the book a self-aware, postmodern style. In fact, the first story in the collection is entitled “Lucien Chabot,” and it provides an unflattering account of a day early in the writer’s attempts to get the files properly typed. However, as the stories progress, Chabot appears to grow in stature, and it becomes obvious he has earned some respect from his peers as a writer and journalist. How chronological the stories are is

difficult to tell, though the progression of Chabot's relationship with Liz Henty, the typist, provides some evidence that the stories are in a certain kind of chronological order. With postmodern awareness, the reader recognises that both the respect earned by Chabot from his peers, and the chronology of the file, are circumstantial and very provisional.

"The Case Against Writer's Week," "The Case Against the Interview" and "The Case for Rumour" also critique the literary scene. In "The Case Against Writer's Week," Blosseville's most honoured writer, who, like Hasluck-the-writer, has received more positive recognition overseas than at home, makes an extremely short, almost meaningless, speech to a gathering of writers. The honoured writer's voice has been nobbled by the savage press he received previously when expressing an opinion about the Creole literature of Gournay and Dupuis. Hasluck-the-critic, in a number of articles, such as "The Antipodean Panoptique," is particularly critical of the silencing of Australia's literary voices by vicious attacks of critics in the press. In spite of the honoured writer in *The Blosseville File* not saying anything controversial, a reporter still manages to misquote and attack him in an article in the *Sunday Review*.

Another aspect of the literary world is critiqued in *The Blosseville File* through the medium of crime writing and court reporting, whether through newspapers or biographical reflections. In his capacity as a court reporter, Chabot explores the multiple possibilities and stories which surround a number of sensational court cases in "Approaching the Centrepiece." In this story Chabot's status in the newspaper industry is made evident in that the story is the text of a speech he gives at the Blosseville Press Club. As a literary aside, Hasluck-the-writer functions as Hasluck-the-critic, for, through Chabot's speech, he censures Frank Tuohy as "the writer in *The Times Literary Supplement*" who condemned *The Blue Guitar* for emphasising sleazy environments and neglecting the beauty and marked individuality of Perth (81, see "Things as They Are," 430). Sometimes the writer's memory is long and the intertextual pen is sharp.

Chabot's speech carries a strong hint of Hasluck-the-writer drawing on his own childhood, for Chabot remembers events of his boyhood and connects them to the sagas of three gruesome murder trials which held Blosseville riveted. The murders correlate to the Birnie, Cooke and Beamish trials which have become indelibly imprinted on the minds of the Perth community.<sup>56</sup> "What is the truth?" asks Chabot. How can the pleasant skies of the Arcadian world of Blosseville hide such heinous crimes? Chabot's wide-ranging address to the Press Club demonstrates to his audience the merging of the worlds of truth and fiction, for no matter whether you are an early, antipodean explorer, a writer or a condemned murderer, "fiction is the stuff reputations are made of" (80). Writers and reporters participate in the stuff of reputations, and as a writer Chabot seeks to enter into the world of a deaf mute, who possibly was wrongly jailed for murder. The frustration of the writer to express alternative worlds, and his inability to dislodge the tag of murderer given to the deaf mute, shows in the personal temper of his speech.

When I saw him sitting there alone that day, I knew how it felt to be that boy; and I still do. I feel that I have something special to say about him – if only I could tell his story. (87)

But stories change when they are placed under pressure, whether the pressure is on history with the passing of time, on a witness expected to meet the public's demands to deliver a scapegoat, or on a criminal wishing to gain a more notorious reputation.

Similar pressures are on the people involved in the Malaysian drug trial in the short story, "Syampu." This tale is a fictional revisiting of the Chambers and Barlow<sup>57</sup> drug case, in which, under the pressure of the frightening threat of death, the defendants change their stories to incriminate one another. The first part of the story takes place in Malaysia, emphasising the cultural difference between the

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<sup>56</sup> "Approaching the Centrepoint" is an adaptation of a paper presented to the 1987 Festival of Perth Writers' Seminar, "A Sense of Time and Place" (see *Quadrant* 31.12, 66-68). The earlier paper, also reprinted with some minor changes in *Offcuts*, is Hasluck-the-writer's personal impressions about the very public murder trials of David and Catherine Birnie in 1986, Eric Edgar Cooke in 1963 and Daryl Beamish in 1961 (see also *Australia Through Time*, pages 394 and 489).

<sup>57</sup> Brian Chambers and Kevin Barlow were Australians who were hanged on drug charges in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, on 7 July 1986 (*Australia Through Time*, 486)

worlds of Australia and its near northern neighbours, for the two Australian defendants are depicted as being out of their depth in a strange country with an unfamiliar legal system.

The story of "Syampu," like the stories in the law courts, also changes under pressure when being retold in different contexts by Chabot. Furthermore, being open-ended, it sometimes becomes a story which peters out, and at other times simply remains as snatches of a story which leads nowhere. In the process of its formation, the narrator says, there have been stories which have been written but thrown away, "sheets and sheets of half-filled paper dumped in the bin, a few fragments finding their way into the Blossenville File" (184). The fragmentation of the stories is a postmodern trait which correlates well with the fragmentary nature of the collection in the File.

However, the postmodern characteristic of fragmentation is not just in the story writing, but is also in the clash of the world of art with the sphere of the law. Juxtaposed to the life and death ordeal of the defendants in the legal system is Chabot's search for a painting. It is this search which takes him to Gournay, where the Creole lifestyle stands in stark contrast to the sophisticated city-life on the mainland. A dichotomy exists between the perception of the artist and that of the lawyer, for when a Judge remembers the painting Chabot is looking for, he recalls a man drawing a bucket of water from the end of a jetty, with cranes and derricks in the background and a group of angry sailors watching (143). The Judge could never work out why a peasant would be drawing salt water from the bay. In fact, as a fellow painter later explains, the artist had painted a man lowering water from the village well to a group of thirsty sailors, and in the background was a rough impression of trees and vines (181). The crafts of the lawyer and the artist may be similar in many ways, especially in the fictitious construction of their subjects, but, in spite of the similarities, a gulf in perception creates a chasm between them. Through the use of postmodern devices of open-endedness, fragmentation and shifting interpretations, Hasluck-the-writer seeks to productively expose these

similarities which are concealed by the perceptions produced by the apparent chasm between the discourses of law and literature.

### ***A Grain of Truth***

Hasluck's next novel, *A Grain of Truth*, also examines the law in a postmodern, literary light. This novel, too, is set in the imaginary colony of *Baie de Baudin* on the West Australian coast, where a Francophone influence affects both the off-shore islands and the city of Blosseville on the mainland. The speculative history and the imaginative sense of place is strangely mixed with familiar elements from Western Australia's history and environment, such as the Indian Ocean Cup hosted by the harbour city of St Allouarn, which is a clear parallel to Fremantle and the America's Cup Defence of 1983. *A Grain of Truth* revolves around a legal firm and a drug trial in Blosseville. In this cocooned world, the truth behind the characters and those involved in the drug trial is never established for certain, but rather the atmosphere is like Revenant's description of his *Panoptique* when viewed from the mainland:

By day, adrift in a mirage, the central dome of the correction house becomes an amazing buoy, floating in two halves somewhere between the sea and the sky. At nightfall, in silhouette, it shrinks to a black opal on the ocean's rim. . . . Future generations will see it first one way, then another, as people talk about me and magnify my vices. So be it. Illusions are kept alive by rumour, although most tales contain a grain of truth. (vii)

Ironically, the *Panoptique* on Dupuis was built as a stable, strong, visible "structure in the service of the law" (248). The shifting, obscure nature of the image of the Panopticon is not only relevant to Revenant and Blosseville, but is characteristic of the world inhabited by the law in the city of Perth – and elsewhere.

Once again, however, *A Grain of Truth*, like *The Blosseville File*, is not a "what if" account of the French settlement on the western seaboard of Australia, but is a critique of aspects of Western Australian society, developed through the framework



of the imaginary community in *The Country Without Music*. The narrative includes some new characters, and some old ones from the previous two books, as well as a cameo appearance from Dyson Garrick, of *The Blue Guitar*. The novel's primary subject is the legal system in Western Australia, and it especially targets the fickle nature of the law, and the self-serving interests of many in the legal profession. Concerned with the meaning-making processes of the law, the novel exposes the sophistry of the legal sphere, which, like the sophistry of modern literary theory derided by Hasluck-the-critic in "Under the Uglich Bell," takes its pretensions too seriously and endeavours to become a place of ideological refuge from the everyday pain and experience of life. The self-interested nature of the law can mean that often the law is not concerned with individuals so much as with its own imagined world which it has created, court cases often assuming the appearance of the law defending itself against the law while the individuals in the case are brutalised or ignored.

Furthermore, *A Grain of Truth* exposes the lawyers' equivocation in hiding behind the age-old virtues of reticence and "professional conduct rules." It is too easy, the novel maintains, for lawyers to shelter in their self-created world of pedantic legal jargon and complex technicalities. One professional conduct rule often repeated throughout the novel is "Blessed are the reticent." This dictum, while providing wise advice to lawyers who may be prone to rush in to court proceedings and tell too much too soon, is also responsible, claims the narrator, for a lack of accountability amongst lawyers towards the public good and an unhealthy over-identification with those they advise. In language which recalls Western Australia's WA Inc fiasco of the 1980s, Michael speculates that

[a] lawyer had to keep his client's secrets, sure, but look what happened when everyone kept quiet. Blossegate – not a state, but a state of mind. A place inhabited by avaricious businessmen, would-be power brokers and compliant toadies. (235)

However, on the other side, in defence of the lawyers caught in the maelstrom, Michael's older, retired partner elaborates that it is the nature of the practice of law which keeps lawyers from speaking out.

A lawyer gets so used to acting on instructions that he runs the risk of finishing up with nothing to say for himself – always an empty vessel waiting to be filled, accustomed to voicing his opinion only when there are facts to back him up. He hesitates when most people would instinctively express their indignation. (246)

With this explanation, Michael's senior partner is trying to apologise for his betrayal of Michael many years before, when his failure to speak in his defence before Judge Brandon brought Michael great hardship and long-term professional disrepute. *A Grain of Truth*, then, is not a one-sided critique of the legal profession, but a perceptive, open-ended exploration of issues which does not provide dogmatic answers.

Moreover, the novel's critique extends beyond the court processes to the office of the bench itself. Michael, reluctantly, is eventually compelled to leave the safety of his normal duties as a conveyancer to venture into the new-style court rooms. He finds himself in an almost alien world, and it forces him into a reflective mood, as he ponders on the strange transformation by which a judge is created from the metamorphosing of a lawyer. Deliberating on the history of Judge Brandon before whom he must appear, he is hit by the realisation that judges are peculiar people, for they begin as idealistic lawyers, but their idealism is soon swamped by the demands of work and the desire for prosperity (185). However,

upon appointment to the bench, the idealistic side of their natures, rigorously suppressed for several decades, surfaced again, and in no time they were lecturing counsel about costs and declining standards. (186)

Satirically, Michael views the idealism about such petty issues as "almost touching." The Judge, while making lofty pronouncements about the importance of using the court's time judiciously, adjourns the proceedings and ignores the extra cost the delays mean to the lawyer's client. Furthermore, Michael agitatedly reflects, as he warms up to his theme, judges cannot afford to be afflicted by self-doubt, and, so,

the combination of lofty tone and an apparent absence of any doubt about the views he expressed was bound to give the judge an aura of infallibility

which, in some cases, was enough to fool not only those who appeared before him, and the old friends who met him on social occasions, but also the man himself – especially when, for all his cleverness, he let the habit of introspection fall into disrepair. (186)

Michael's stinging attack on the petty lawlessness and narrow-minded aloofness of those who are entrusted with the responsibility to uphold the law drives him into a new-found zealousness for action.

Sensing that part of the problem with judges is the gender imbalance in their ranks, Michael goes on to advocate that it is time a few more women were appointed to the bench. Jane Bemis, the first woman lawyer employed by Michael's firm, has widened his prejudiced horizons, for she is a very competent, intelligent and gutsy advocate who can hold her own in the male-dominated legal world. It is her lead which challenges and brings out the best in Michael, saving him from remaining the epitome of a mature, retiring lawyer who avoids the rigorousness of the court by quietly sticking to his conveyancing. With these issues, then, *A Grain of Truth* raises questions about the type of justice, the type of legal world and the type of society we already have, and want to develop, in Western Australia.

*A Grain of Truth* also critiques the massive physical changes in the legal world, brought about by modernisation, such as the introduction of computers to replace archivists and typists. The modifications are documented through the aging Michael's struggles to come to terms with the pace of change. Moves to modernise the court system begin with the appointment of a new Chief Justice, and in no time, it seems, the court system is being streamlined, the buildings renovated and the procedures revamped. In all the description and comment on buildings, processes and persons, the transforming events in Blossenville's judicial system appear to parallel events and changes which have recently taken place in the judicial system in Western Australia.

In *A Grain of Truth*, the ontological questions which can be asked of the world of the law and the type of society it is seeking to maintain are inevitably linked to the

subjective discourse of art rather than to the confining, panoptic technologies of the law. Michael, for example, reflects on the irony that the law is mostly about “logic-chopping and creating neat fictions,” rather than about understanding worlds which generate possibilities for truth and justice (224). This has been a constant theme in Hasluck’s writing. In an article about the connection between literature and the law, appropriately entitled “Imprudent Friends,” Hasluck-the-critic states

that writers who reflect what is happening in the world, who portray things as they are, can fairly be described as society’s unofficial legislators: in showing the way in which condition once thought to be satisfactory have been overtaken by events, in revealing the diversity of human concerns, writers and artists prepare society for change. They make sure that the need for reform is understood. Crusty judges and liberal-minded literati may discover, to their mutual surprise (or horror), that, in some respects, they share a common outlook. (101)

In *A Grain of Truth*, the narrator ponders that “Perhaps the lawyer, like the wandering poet, should always be looking deeper, searching for the hidden meaning, the subtle innuendo” (224).

The person who most exemplifies this connection between the worlds of literature and the law in *A Grain of Truth* is Henri Revenant, who is not just a law-maker, but an architect-philosopher. He is the builder of the *Panoptique* on Dupuis, and the creator of St Allouarn’s artificial beach and the prison Tower which overlooks it. Revenant is also characterised as a leading dissident of his day, whose writing, *Architectural Odyssey*, is an eclectic work which delves into law, history, philosophy, architecture and social engineering. As Jane Bemis discovers, the book, which is sometimes used as a legal reference, “swarms with the wildest fictions, being little more than a satirical fantasy” (240).<sup>58</sup> However, Michael’s senior partner comments that:

When Revenant wrote the law and liberty section of the *Odyssey* he wasn’t working as an historian might, trying to paint an accurate picture of the

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<sup>58</sup> Hasluck-the-writer investigates a similar legal fiction which influenced Watergate in “House of Mirrors.”

past, he was speaking as a poet and philosopher, someone who understands the needs of a changing society, partly by intuition, and comes up with good advice – which is what creative lawyers should try to do. (245)

The law must have an ontological side which complements, and combats the cold epistemological element which can “chew people up” (176). The ontological is a counter-knowledge. It is looking at, and not losing sight of, the reason for which the law exists, interpreting it creatively with an understanding which champions the principles on which it is based, rather than demanding a pig-headed adherence to the maze of sometimes senseless rules and the articles which have grown up around it. It is the realisation that the law is a creative world which dramatically interacts with other often disparate worlds. The “counter-knowledge draws its creativity, meaning and strength from the world of art, and, in turn, it participates in the governance and configuration of worlds other than the strictly legal. It is the enforced suppression of this “creative” counter-knowledge in the legal system which leads the senior partner to comment that “in every lawyer there lies the wreck of a poet” (247). Michael taps into this counter-knowledge, and it becomes his strength when he must face the injustice of the courts of justice.

Michael’s rejuvenated strength is drawn from a metaphor depicted in an impressionistic painting, by a local artist. It is of a bullfight, which shows

a sticklike matador taunting the bull with what seemed to be an exploding scarlet cape; behind the combatants, tiers of crowded seats rising crookedly to become a cubist barricade along the skyline. (110-11)

The power of the painting, for Michael, is that in the arena, “the bull gradually discovers his ‘*querencia*’ – the place in the ring which suits him best. The place where he gathers his strength” (47). This site may be where he first enters the ring or where he is first wounded. To Michael, the *querencia* is not a place empowered by knowledge and legal rules, but a site of inner power from which the contender can gather energy for the fight. It is a place of imagination and self-assessment, and amongst the contending narratives of the court room – those of the defence, the prosecution, the judge’s summation and the version decided on as the truth by the jury – it becomes a shaper of the truth. As the narrator asserts: “The nature of the

true story was determined by the power structure that brought it into being" (223). The lawyer's truth, then, depends on its *querencia*, the power of the site that imagined it, shaped it and brought it into existence. The *querencia* is not epistemological but an ontological site of counter-knowledge. It is a creative place from which one can gather strength to take a necessary and strategic stand.<sup>59</sup>

Another cogent metaphor, in *A Grain of Truth*, which exposes the pretentious sophistry of the legal world through a vision of the simple complexity of art, is the stained glass window, or "painting with light" (217). Like the narrative constructed in the courtroom, which is always framed and changing, the stained-glass image is constantly shifting through a wide variety of hues, from the glow of the sunrise to the deepening tones of sunset. As Tom the glassier expounds:

'Each time you see what seems to be a simple image the ambiguities implicit in the multi-layering effect force you to think again, to look with what you see with a fresh eye. To try and make a final judgement is absurd – because the effect depends partly upon the light-adaptive behaviour of the human eye and the fact that as the years go by the viewer will probably change as much as the light does.'

Michael [the lawyer] felt that he had to defend himself. 'Lawyers don't have time for such subtlety,' he observed drily. (263-64)

Thus, like the other novels of Hasluck, *A Grain of Truth* asserts that the world created by the law is never static but constantly changing, depending on a multiplicity of fictional narratives, all of which throw different shades of light and colour onto the legal scene. So, like all institutions, the law must not take itself too seriously, for it must be aware of its own constructedness and the compromised nature of its truth, and from that sense of self-knowledge it can imaginatively listen to the many narratives, both within and outside its own domain.

So, then, in different ways, these three novels of Hasluck speak of ontologies and counter-knowledges in a variety of worlds. One theme which is common to them

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<sup>59</sup> Hasluck-the-writer describes the energy, horror and romance of a bullfight in his short story "The Blindfolded Horse."

all, is that the counter-knowledges produced through the arts (music in *The Country Without Music*, literature in *The Blossville File*, and painting in *A Grain of Truth*) empower the oppressed to take a strategic stand. To the powerful, like Charles Villiers, Don Ryan and Judge Brandon, counter-knowledge is troublesome. However, although the oppressed possess the counter-knowledges, and they are empowered by them, they do not guarantee success. For example, the counter-knowledge of the bone flute conjures up an unseen world which has no power to release the oppressed, but rather it leaves all the participants different from what they were.

Furthermore, the fragile and mystical nature of the counter-knowledges is highlighted in *The Country Without Music* in that the indigenous people of the mainland punished musicians who played badly,

not because what they did was unpleasant to the ear but because they had failed to bring some aspect of the spiritual world into being which might otherwise have revealed its glory. (88)

So, too, the writer who fails to conjure a mystical world which leaves the reader with a deeper perceptiveness has also failed. So, too, the lawyer who fails to use his or her imagination to gain a better perception of the stained-glass window of the law is doomed to play insignificant games. Each needs to find his or her *querencia* from which to make a strategic stand. At the end of *The Country Without Music*, as Jacqueline leaves her home for the last time, the old family servant who has cared for her since she was a child, tells her,

“There is a kind of music heard so deeply that it ceases to be heard at all. You become yourself the tune. What leaves you speechless tells others who you are. . . . You are Ilois,” he said. It was the first time I had ever heard him use the word. “You are Ilois.” (186)

With such music, then, although you cannot control the unfolding of events, ontologically speaking, you will always belong, you will always have a future, and your country will never be a country without music.

## Chapter 8

**Conclusion**

*What are we to make of each other?*

*You raise your hand in greeting.*

*I raise my hand in farewell.*

*We have come a long way together.*

(from "Chinese Journey," 83)

This thesis demonstrates that Hasluck's novels can be read in many different ways on many different levels. They can be read generically through the mystery-thriller and negative thriller genres. They can also be read as satire. But the reading this investigation has set out to examine in greater detail is through the paradigm of the shift from modernism to postmodernism. This approach has been developed in the second half of this thesis, and it contends that as Hasluck's work moves from a modernist to a postmodern approach, it also moves from dealing with universal issues to confronting national and regional concerns. Some of those regional issues are tackled through the medium of historiographic metafiction, other issues are dealt with through a more theoretical framework, such as the use of Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, while still others are speculated on in an imaginary world which is mostly pure fabrication, but still draws on a variety of historical and geographical sources.

Reading Hasluck's work through the framework of a transformation in Western culture requires a retrospective gaze. The early critics of Hasluck's work did not have the advantage of hindsight and largely framed their readings through the thriller genre. But this has proved to be a limiting reading. Furthermore, the restrictive way of reading Hasluck's work has been compounded by the fact that it can be complex in subject matter and themes. His novels, moreover, did not take long to become specifically regional in focus, and this, together with the deliberate corrupting of genre and history, meant that his work fell in an interregnum in both literary style and content. Additionally, Hasluck, as both writer and critic, also falls into an interregnum in that, as a critic, he protests against the postmodern, but, as a writer,



his work reflects many postmodern traits. This paradox means that his work is contemporary and postmodern, but it has a modernist tone resonating subconsciously beneath it. This resonance highlights the conservative nature of the radical in Hasluck-the-writer, and is a pervasive undertone in addition to the inevitable presence of the modern in the postmodern.

Even in their use of the postmodern, Hasluck's narratives maintain their modernist, universal appeal by turning the regional into a fantasy world which challenges some of the larger issues of history, law and literature, exploring the conundrum of how we construct, maintain and perceive ourselves. Thus, Hasluck-the-writer's postmodernism does not lead to the total breakdown of all subject positions, but allows such constructs as a sense of nation and nationalism to remain. Instead, the modernist project which Veronica Brady calls "the Robinson Crusoe response, the determination to make a self and a world" ("Place, Taste," 109), is present in most of the texts. However, although Hasluck's novels do create and explore a world of nations and identities, due to the postmodern efficacy, the narrative self is fragmented and often chaotic. Only Michael Cheyne, the protagonist in *A Grain of Truth*, shows some sort of coherence and movement towards future possibilities. If we are what we imagine ourselves to be, Hasluck-the-writer appears to be asking, then the question is – how far can we push and reinterpret the institutions of society, such as history, law, literature, through the metaphors, language and symbols of our shared imagination? This is particularly the project of Hasluck's later novels.

To use one of his own metaphors, Hasluck-the-writer is a serious, literary musician, who does not perform to amuse an audience with renditions of popular compositions, but seeks to play truant, fringe melodies from the ancestral tones of Western Australia. Those tones are both localised but migrant, Australian but European, recent but timeless. Indigenous overtures are called upon from time to time, but they are played upon bone flutes, stolen metaphors for European self-discovery, rather than an attempt to seriously interpret the collision of indigenous and European worlds. Instead, Hasluck-the-writer's medley begins as a celebration of all humankind, a liturgy of modernity through which to explore the human condition, the themes of *Quarantine* and *The Blue Guitar* being universal though well-fashioned in the writer's

background experience of the alienation and isolation of Western Australia. This is followed by the dark, parodic resonance of *The Hand That Feeds You: A Satiric Nightmare* as he explores the national and political health of Australia. Subsequently, the tune changes to embrace the headiness and the pain of the forgotten ancestral rhythms of Western Australia's European history in *The Bellarmine Jug* and *Truant State*. The narratives' arias speculate on the meaning of the state's memories, and they creatively fill in the gaps left by the forgotten past. Regionalism is explored in these novels through the strains of historiographic metafiction. Then, with a burst of symphonic energy, a chimerical world is conjured up in *The Country Without Music*, *The Blossville File* and *A Grain of Truth*. To some critics, such as Kieran Dolin, this world is a farrago of music like that of the compositions of the Creoles on the island of Dupuis – a confused, hotchpotch or a medley ("Farrago for Australia: Law, Power and Textuality in Three Novels of Nicholas Hasluck," 120). To others, like Helen Daniel, it is a fugue – a polyphonic composition based on multiple themes and voices, a contrapuntal medley, gradually building up to a complex climax ("Splendid Fugues of Truth and Masquerade," 9)

But when the books have been read and silence ensues, nothing has changed, except, perhaps, that the listeners, the readers, are left different from before. The tension has been built, and the anxiety remains. Yet, by maintaining the tension, leaving it unresolved, Hasluck-the-writer overcomes Brady's criticism that "too much Western Australian writing is evasive, attempts to defuse rather than endure tension" ("Place, Taste," 106). Hasluck's work is committed to engagement and process rather than to closure and answers. The sophistries of law and literature are exposed, the liminalities of identity, text and history are explored, the determinism of life in Western, educated society is undermined, and the sacred axioms such as truth and justice are problematised.

Part of the music of Hasluck-the-writer's ensemble includes the tolling of the Uglich bell. This bell was rung in Uglich at news of the assassination of the Russian crown prince, and as punishment it was flogged, condemned to never sound again and sent into exile to Tobolsk, Siberia. Later, however, after Dostoyevsky's death sentence was commuted to banishment to Siberia, he "trudged under the wayward bell,

listening to its resolute voice calling the inhabitants of the district to prayer" ("Under the Uglich Bell," 183). To Hasluck-the-critic, the incongruity symbolises,

on the one hand, the capricious ability of those in power to carry their fixations into effect, but . . . on the other hand, the futility of trying to suppress the subject's essential nature. It can be tortured with whips and branding irons, but so long as the bell exists it is bound to ring again.

("Under the Uglich Bell," 183)

The bell stands for moments of reversal, and for the inevitability of resurrection. For Hasluck-the-critic its ringing sounds the futility of the "new sophistry" of semiotics and postmodernism, with its features such as "the death of the author." These issues will have their moments of reversal and resurrection, hopes Hasluck-the-critic, which are bound to bring both commonsense and the presence of the author back to literature again.

However, in contrast to the vision of Hasluck-the-critic, the banished status of the tolling Uglich bell can also be seen as a metaphor for the condition of the postmodern, for the bell rings from the margins, far from the centre of the world and the crimson flush of the cathedral spires of Moscow. It has been rehabilitated on a lonely hillside, reinscribing both itself and the lives of prisoner and inhabitant east of the Urals. It is exiled but present; forbidden but empowered; silenced but ringing. So, too, Hasluck's work, in spite of its orthodox appearance, abuses and uses, denies and confirms, unsettles and reinforces both the marginal and the familiar through its ability to reinscribe and reverse, and its dexterity to conjure-up and resurrect. The aptitude and commitment of many writers and critics (as well as Hasluck) to engagement and process rather than to closure and answers means the music will go on, and other challenging novels will appear, each needing to be read in its different contexts, and, in turn, modifying the already-articulated readings of the Hasluck oeuvre.

The fugue goes on.

The readings will continue.

The tolling bell will not be silenced . . .

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## Appendix A

### Nicholas Hasluck: A Bibliography

This bibliography of the works of Nicholas Hasluck is set out topically and chronologically to help the reader locate the novels, reviews, articles, interviews and other works within the historical context in which they were published. The bibliography includes primary and secondary sources, each divided into the different media fields. The full details of all references are given, except for those poems, short stories and articles found in larger collections (consisting of five or more pieces of work), the details of the collections being given beforehand in the appropriate section.

This bibliography is more extensive than the Austlit CD Rom index of January 1998, and includes a number of corrections on those records.

From a review of the bibliography, the following points can be observed.

- The bibliography demonstrates that Hasluck's work has constantly attracted critical articles, in both the mass media and literary journals.
- The only substantial interview with Hasluck (as both writer and critic) to date is by Candida Baker, in *Yacker* (1986).
- The majority of Hasluck's poems were written before 1980 (the date of his last, main collection of poems) and the change in his literary emphasis can be seen in the lack of reviews on his poetry since 1985.
- Although short stories have been regularly published by Hasluck-the-writer, the majority after 1978 are reprints or extracts from his novels.
- The novel has been Hasluck-the-writer's main literary medium since the publication of *Quarantine* in 1979.
- Hasluck's essays begin in earnest the mid-1980s, and become more prolific in the 1990s. A number of them have been presented as papers at seminars, conferences and public-speaking engagements, showing Hasluck's increasing public profile.



- Since 1990 Hasluck-the-writer scripted a few dramatical productions, attempting to branch into new media for presenting his work, but without much success.
- Also since 1990, Hasluck-the-critic has turned his attention to the work of other writers, producing an increasing number of critical reviews, mainly for *Quadrant* and *Australian Book Review*.

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