



HSC English Prescriptions 2015–20

English (Advanced)

Module B: Critical Study of Texts

Speeches

© 2013 Copyright Board of Studies NSW for and on behalf of the Crown in right of the State of New South Wales.

This document contains Material prepared by the Board of Studies NSW for and on behalf of the State of New South Wales. The Material is protected by Crown copyright.

All rights reserved. No part of the Material may be reproduced in Australia or in any other country by any process, electronic or otherwise, in any material form or transmitted to any other person or stored electronically in any form without the prior written permission of the Board of Studies NSW, except as permitted by the *Copyright Act 1968*. School students in NSW and teachers in schools in NSW may copy reasonable portions of the Material for the purposes of bona fide research or study.

When you access the Material you agree:

- to use the Material for information purposes only
- to reproduce a single copy for personal bona fide study use only and not to reproduce any major extract or the entire Material without the prior permission of the Board of Studies NSW
- to acknowledge that the Material is provided by the Board of Studies NSW
- not to make any charge for providing the Material or any part of the Material to another person or in any way make commercial use of the Material without the prior written consent of the Board of Studies NSW and payment of the appropriate copyright fee
- to include this copyright notice in any copy made
- not to modify the Material or any part of the Material without the express prior written permission of the Board of Studies NSW.

The Material may contain third-party copyright materials such as photos, diagrams, quotations, cartoons and artworks. These materials are protected by Australian and international copyright laws and may not be reproduced or transmitted in any format without the copyright owner's specific permission. Unauthorised reproduction, transmission or commercial use of such copyright materials may result in prosecution.

The Board of Studies has made all reasonable attempts to locate owners of third-party copyright material and invites anyone from whom permission has not been sought to contact the Copyright Officer, ph (02) 9367 8289, fax (02) 9279 1482.

Published by

Board of Studies NSW
GPO Box 5300
Sydney NSW 2001
Australia

Tel: (02) 9367 8111

Fax: (02) 9367 8484

Internet: www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au

20130280

Contents

Speech to the Israeli Knesset	4
Redfern Speech.....	12
‘Spotty-Handed Villainesses’	17
‘An Australian history for us all’	25
‘It is still winter at home’	32
‘On not winning the Nobel Prize’	34
‘A Home in Fiction’	42

Anwar Sadat, President of Egypt
Speech to the Israeli Knesset

20 November 1977
Translated from Hebrew

In the name of God, the Gracious and Merciful.

Mr. Speaker, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Peace and the mercy of God Almighty be upon you and may peace be for us all, God willing. Peace for us all on the Arab land, and in Israel as well, as in every part of this big world, which is so complexed by its sanguinary conflicts, disturbed by its sharp contradictions, menaced now and then by destructive wars launched by man to annihilate his fellow man. Finally, amidst the ruins of what man has built and the remains of the victims of Mankind, there emerges neither victor nor vanquished. The only vanquished remains man, God's most sublime creation, man whom God has created – as Gandhi the apostle of peace puts it: to forge ahead to mould the way of life and worship God Almighty.

I come to you today on solid ground, to shape a new life, to establish peace. We all, on this land, the land of God; we all, Muslims, Christians and Jews, worship God and no one but God. God's teachings and commandments are love, sincerity, purity and peace.

I do not blame all those who received my decision – when I announced it to the entire world before the Egyptian People's Assembly – with surprise and amazement. Some, gripped by the violent surprise, believed that my decision was no more than verbal juggling to cater for world public opinion. Others, still, interpreted it as political tactics to camouflage my intention of launching a new war. I would go as far as to tell you that one of my aides at the Presidential Office contacted me at a late hour following my return home from the People's Assembly and sounded worried as he asked me: 'Mr. President, what would be our reaction if Israel should actually extend an invitation to you?' I replied calmly, I will accept it immediately. I have declared that I will go to the end of the world; I will go to Israel, for I want to put before the People of Israel all the facts.

I can see the point of all those who were astounded by my decision or those who had any doubts as to the sincerity of the intentions behind the declaration of my decision. No one would have ever conceived that the President of the biggest Arab state, which bears the heaviest burden and the top responsibility pertaining to the cause of war and peace in the Middle East, could declare his readiness to go to the land of the adversary while we were still in a state of war. Rather, we all are still bearing the consequences of four fierce wars waged within 30 years. The families of the 1973 October War are still moaning under the cruel pains of widowhood and bereavement of sons, fathers and brothers.

As I have already declared, I have not consulted, as far as this decision is concerned, with any of my colleagues and brothers, the Arab heads of state or the confrontation States. Those of them who contacted me, following the declaration of this decision, expressed their objection, because the feeling of utter suspicion and absolute lack of confidence between the Arab states and the Palestinian people on the one hand, and Israel on the other, still surges in us all. It is sufficient to say that many months in which peace could have been brought about had been wasted over differences and fruitless discussions on the procedure for the convocation of the Geneva Conference, all showing utter suspicion and absolute lack of confidence.

But, to be absolutely frank with you, I took this decision after long thinking, knowing that it constitutes a grave risk for, if God Almighty has made it my fate to assume the responsibility on behalf of the Egyptian people and to share in the fate-determining responsibility of the Arab Nation and the Palestinian people, the main duty dictated by this responsibility is to exhaust all and every means in a bid to save my Egyptian Arab people and the entire

Arab Nation the horrors of new, shocking and destructive wars, the dimensions of which are foreseen by no other than God himself.

After long thinking, I was convinced that the obligation of responsibility before God, and before the people, make it incumbent on me that I should go to the farthest corner of the world, even to Jerusalem, to address Members of the Knesset, the representatives of the people of Israel, and acquaint them with all the facts surging in me. Then, I would leave you to decide for yourselves. Following this, may God Almighty determine our fate.

Ladies and gentlemen, there are moments in the life of nations and peoples when it is incumbent on those known for their wisdom and clarity of vision to overlook the past, with all its complexities and weighing memories, in a bold drive towards new horizons. Those who, like us, are shouldering the same responsibility entrusted to us, are the first who should have the courage to take fate-determining decisions which are in consonance with the circumstances. We must all rise above all forms of fanaticism, self-deception and obsolete theories of superiority. The most important thing is never to forget that infallibility is the prerogative of God alone.

If I said that I wanted to save all the Arab people the horrors of shocking and destructive wars, I most sincerely declare before you that I have the same feelings and bear the same responsibility towards all and every man on earth, and certainly towards the Israeli people.

Any life lost in war is a human life, irrespective of its being that of an Israeli or an Arab. A wife who becomes a widow is a human being entitled to a happy family life, whether she be an Arab or an Israeli. Innocent children who are deprived of the care and compassion of their parents are ours, be they living on Arab or Israeli land. They command our top responsibility to afford them a comfortable life today and tomorrow.

For the sake of them all, for the safeguard of the lives of all our sons and brothers, for affording our communities the opportunity to work for the progress and happiness of man and his right to a dignified life, for our responsibilities before the generations to come, for a smile on the face of every child born on our land – for all that, I have taken my decision to come to you, despite all hazards, to deliver my address.

I have shouldered the prerequisites of the historical responsibility and, therefore, I declared – on 4 February 1971, to be precise – that I was willing to sign a peace agreement with Israel. This was the first declaration made by a responsible Arab official since, the outbreak of the Arab–Israeli conflict.

Motivated by all these factors dictated by the responsibilities of leadership, I called, on 16 October 1973, before the Egyptian People's Assembly, for an international conference to establish permanent peace based on justice. I was not in the position of he who was pleading for peace or asking for a ceasefire.

Motivated by all these factors dictated by duties of history and leadership, we signed the first disengagement agreement, followed by the second disengagement agreement in Sinai. Then we proceeded trying both open and closed doors in a bid to find a certain path leading to a durable and just peace. We opened our hearts to the peoples of the entire world to make them understand our motivations and objectives, and to leave them actually convinced of the fact that we are advocates of justice and peacemakers.

Motivated by all these factors, I decided to come to you with an open mind and an open heart, and with a conscious determination, so that we might establish permanent peace based on justice.

It is so fated that my trip to you, the trip of peace, should coincide with the Islamic feast, the holy Feast of Courban Bairam, the Feast of Sacrifice when Abraham – peace be upon him – great-grandfather of the Arabs and Jews, submitted to God; I say when God Almighty ordered him, and to Him Abraham went, with dedicated sentiments, not out of weakness, but

through a giant spiritual force and by a free will, to sacrifice his very own son, prompted by a firm and unshakable belief in ideals that lend life a profound significance.

This coincidence may carry a new meaning to us all, which may become a genuine aspiration heralding security and peace.

Ladies and Gentlemen, let us be frank with each other, using straightforward words and a clear conception, with no ambiguity. Let us be frank with each other today while the entire world, both East and West, follows these unparalleled moments which could prove to be a radical turning point in the history of this part of the world, if not in the history of the world as a whole. Let us be frank with each other as we answer this important question: how can we achieve permanent peace based on justice?

I have come to you carrying my clear and frank answer to this big question, so that the people in Israel as well as the whole world might hear it, and so that all those whose devoted prayers ring in my ears, pleading to God Almighty that this historic meeting may eventually lead to the results aspired to by millions, might also hear it.

Before I proclaim my answer, I wish to assure you that, in my clear and frank answer, I am basing myself on a number of facts which no one can deny.

The first fact: no one can build his happiness at the expense of the misery of others.

The second fact: never have I spoken or will ever speak in two languages. Never have I adopted or will adopt two policies. I never deal with anyone except in one language, one policy, and with one face.

The third fact: direct confrontation and a straight line are the nearest and most successful methods to reach a clear objective.

The fourth fact: the call for permanent and just peace, based on respect for the United Nations resolutions, has now become the call of the whole world. It has become a clear expression of the will of the international community, whether in official capitals, where policies are made and decisions taken, or at the level of world public opinion which influences policy-making and decision-taking.

The fifth fact: and this is probably the clearest and most prominent, is that the Arab Nation, in its drive for permanent peace based on justice, does not proceed from a position of weakness or hesitation, but it has the potential of power and stability which tells of a sincere will for peace. The Arab-declared intention stems from an awareness prompted by a heritage of civilisation that, to avoid an inevitable disaster that will befall us, you and the entire world, there is no alternative to the establishment of permanent peace based on justice – peace that is not shaken by storms, swayed by suspicion, or jeopardised by ill intentions.

In the light of these facts which I meant to place before you the way I see them, I would also wish to warn you in all sincerity; I warn you against some thoughts that could cross your minds; frankness makes it incumbent upon me to tell you the following:

First: I have not come here for a separate agreement between Egypt and Israel. This is not part of the policy of Egypt. The problem is not that of Egypt and Israel. Any separate peace between Egypt and Israel, or between any Arab confrontation state and Israel, will not bring permanent peace based on justice in the entire region. Rather, even if peace between all the confrontation states and Israel were achieved, in the absence of a just solution to the Palestinian problem, never will there be that durable and just peace upon which the entire world insists today.

Second: I have not come to you to seek a partial peace, namely to terminate the state of belligerency at this stage, and put off the entire problem to a subsequent stage. This is not the radical solution that would steer us to permanent peace.

Equally, I have not come to you for a third disengagement agreement in Sinai, or in the Golan and the West Bank. For this would mean that we are merely delaying the ignition

of the fuse; it would mean that we are lacking the courage to confront peace, that we are too weak to shoulder the burdens and responsibilities of a durable peace based on justice.

I have come to you so that together we might build a durable peace based on justice, to avoid the shedding of one single drop of blood from an Arab or an Israeli. It is for this reason that I have proclaimed my readiness to go to the farthest corner of the world.

Here, I would go back to the answer to the big question: how can we achieve a durable peace based on justice?

In my opinion, and I declare it to the whole world from this forum, the answer is neither difficult nor impossible, despite long years of feud, blood vengeance, spite and hatred, and breeding generations on concepts of total rift and deep-rooted animosity. The answer is not difficult, nor is it impossible, if we sincerely and faithfully follow a straight line.

You want to live with us in this part of the world. In all sincerity, I tell you, we welcome you among us, with full security and safety. This, in itself, is a tremendous turning point; one of the landmarks of a decisive historical change.

We used to reject you. We had our reasons and our claims, yes. We used to brand you as 'so-called' Israel, yes. We were together in international conferences and organisations and our representatives did not, and still do not, exchange greetings, yes. This has happened and is still happening.

It is also true that we used to set, as a precondition for any negotiations with you, a mediator who would meet separately with each party. Through this procedure, the talks of the first and second disengagement agreements took place.

Our delegates met in the first Geneva Conference without exchanging a direct word. Yes, this has happened.

Yet, today I tell you, and declare it to the whole world, that we accept to live with you in permanent peace based on justice. We do not want to encircle you or be encircled ourselves by destructive missiles ready for launching, nor by the shells of grudges and hatred. I have announced on more than one occasion that Israel has become a fait accompli, recognised by the world, and that the two super powers have undertaken the responsibility of its security and the defence of its existence.

As we really and truly seek peace, we really and truly welcome you to live among us in peace and security.

There was a huge wall between us which you tried to build up over a quarter of a century, but it was destroyed in 1973. It was a wall of a continuously inflammable and escalating psychological warfare. It was a wall of fear of the force that could sweep the entire Arab Nation. It was a wall of propaganda, that we were a nation reduced to a motionless corpse. Rather, some of you had gone as far as to say that, even after 50 years, the Arabs would not regain any strength. It was a wall that threatened always with the long arm that could reach and strike anywhere. It was a wall that warned us against extermination and annihilation if we tried to use our legitimate right to liberate the occupied territories. Together we have to admit that that wall fell and collapsed in 1973.

Yet, there remained another wall. This wall constitutes a psychological barrier between us. A barrier of suspicion. A barrier of rejection. A barrier of fear of deception. A barrier of hallucinations around any action, deed or decision. A barrier of cautious and erroneous interpretations of all and every event or statement. It is this psychological barrier which I described in official statements as representing 70 percent of the whole problem.

Today, through my visit to you, I ask you: why don't we stretch our hands with faith and sincerity so that, together, we might destroy this barrier? Why shouldn't ours and your will meet with faith and sincerity, so that together we might remove all suspicion of fear, betrayal and ill intentions? Why don't we stand together with the bravery of men and the boldness of

heroes who dedicate themselves to a sublime objective? Why don't we stand together with the same courage and boldness to erect a huge edifice of peace that builds and does not destroy? An edifice that is a beacon for generations to come – the human message for construction, development and the dignity of man? Why should we bequeath to the coming generations the plight of bloodshed, death, orphans, widowhood, family disintegration and the wailing of victims?

Why don't we believe in the wisdom of God conveyed to us by the Proverbs of Solomon:

'Deceit is in the heart of them that imagine evil; but to the counsellors of peace is joy. Better is a dry morsel, and quietness therewith, than a house full of sacrifices with strife.'

Why don't we repeat together from the Psalms of David:

'Hear the voice of my supplications, when I cry unto thee, when I lift up my hands toward thy holy oracle. Draw me not away with the wicked, and with the workers of iniquity, which speak peace to their neighbours, but mischief is in their hearts. Give them according to their deeds, and according to the wickedness of their endeavours.'

To tell you the truth, peace cannot be worth its name unless it is based on justice, and not on the occupation of the land of others. It would not be appropriate for you to demand for yourselves what you deny others. With all frankness, and with the spirit that has prompted me to come to you today, I tell you: you have to give up, once and for all, the dreams of conquest, and give up the belief that force is the best method for dealing with the Arabs. You should clearly understand and assimilate the lesson of confrontation between you and us.

Expansion does not pay. To speak frankly, our land does not yield itself to bargaining. It is not even open to argument. To us, the national soil is equal to the holy valley where God Almighty spoke to Moses – peace be upon him. None of us can, or accept to, cede one inch of it, or accept the principle of debating or bargaining over it.

I sincerely tell you that before us today lies the appropriate chance for peace, if we are really serious in our endeavours for peace. It is a chance that time cannot afford once again. It is a chance that, if lost or wasted, the plotter against it will bear the curse of humanity and the curse of history.

What is peace for Israel? It means that Israel lives in the region with her Arab neighbours, in security and safety. To such logic, I say yes. It means that Israel lives within her borders, secure against any aggression. To such logic, I say yes. It means that Israel obtains all kinds of guarantees that ensure those two factors. To this demand, I say yes. More than that: we declare that we accept all the international guarantees you envisage and accept. We declare that we accept all the guarantees you want from the two super powers or from either of them, or from the Big Five, or some of them.

Once again, I declare clearly and unequivocally that we agree to any guarantees you accept because, in return, we shall obtain the same guarantees.

In short, then, when we ask: what is peace for Israel, the answer would be: it is that Israel lives within her borders with her Arab neighbours, in safety and security within the framework of all the guarantees she accepts and which are offered to the other party. But how can this be achieved? How can we reach this conclusion which would lead us to permanent peace based on justice?

There are facts that should be faced with all courage and clarity. There are Arab territories which Israel has occupied by armed force. We insist on complete withdrawal from these territories, including Arab Jerusalem.

I have come to Jerusalem, as the City of Peace, which will always remain as a living embodiment of coexistence among believers of the three religions. It is inadmissible that

anyone should conceive the special status of the City of Jerusalem within the framework of annexation or expansionism, but it should be a free and open city for all believers.

Above all, the city should not be severed from those who have made it their abode for centuries. Instead of awakening the prejudices of the Crusaders, we should revive the spirit of Omar ibn el-Khattab and Saladdin, namely the spirit of tolerance and respect for rights. The holy shrines of Islam and Christianity are not only places of worship, but a living testimony of our uninterrupted presence here politically, spiritually and intellectually. Let us make no mistake about the importance and reverence we Christians and Muslims attach to Jerusalem.

Let me tell you, without the slightest hesitation, that I did not come to you under this dome to make a request that your troops evacuate the occupied territories. Complete withdrawal from the Arab territories occupied in 1967 is a logical and undisputed fact. Nobody should plead for that. Any talk about permanent peace based on justice, and any move to ensure our coexistence in peace and security in this part of the world, would become meaningless, while you occupy Arab territories by force of arms. For there is no peace that could be in consonance with, or be built on, the occupation of the land of others. Otherwise, it would not be a serious peace.

Yes, this is a foregone conclusion which is not open to discussion or debate – if intentions are sincere and if endeavours to establish a just and durable peace for ours and the generations to come are genuine.

As for the Palestinians' cause, nobody could deny that it is the crux of the entire problem. Nobody in the world could accept, today, slogans propagated here in Israel, ignoring the existence of the Palestinian people, and questioning their whereabouts. The cause of the Palestinian people and their legitimate rights are no longer ignored or denied today by anybody. Rather, nobody who has the ability of judgement can deny or ignore it.

It is an acknowledged fact received by the world community, both in the East and in the West, with support and recognition in international documents and official statements. It is of no use to anybody to turn deaf ears to its resounding voice which is being heard day and night, or to overlook its historical reality. Even the United States, your first ally which is absolutely committed to safeguard Israel's security and existence, and which offered and still offers Israel every moral, material and military support – I say – even the United States has opted to face up to reality and facts, and admit that the Palestinian people are entitled to legitimate rights and that the Palestinian problem is the core and essence of the conflict and that, so long as it continues to be unresolved, the conflict will continue to aggravate, reaching new dimensions. In all sincerity, I tell you that there can be no peace without the Palestinians. It is a grave error of unpredictable consequences to overlook or brush aside this cause.

I shall not indulge in past events since the Balfour Declaration 60 years ago. You are well acquainted with the relevant facts. If you have found the legal and moral justification to set up a national home on a land that did not all belong to you, it is incumbent upon you to show understanding of the insistence of the People of Palestine on establishing, once again (sic) a state on their land. When some extremists ask the Palestinians to give up this sublime objective, this, in fact, means asking them to renounce their identity and every hope for the future.

I hail the Israeli voices that called for the recognition of the Palestinian people's rights to achieve and safeguard peace. Here I tell you, ladies and gentlemen, that it is no use to refrain from recognising the Palestinian people and their rights to statehood and rights of return.

We, the Arabs, have faced this experience before, with you and with the reality of Israeli existence. The struggle took us from war to war, from victims to more victims, until you and

we have today reached the edge of a horrifying abyss and a terrifying disaster, unless, together, we seize the opportunity, today, of a durable peace based on justice.

You have to face reality bravely as I have done. There can never be any solution to a problem by evading it or turning a deaf ear to it. Peace cannot last if attempts are made to impose fantasy concepts on which the world has turned its back and announced its unanimous call for the respect of rights and facts. There is no need to enter a vicious circle as to Palestinian rights. It is useless to create obstacles. Otherwise the march of peace will be impeded or peace will be blown up.

As I have told you, there is no happiness to the detriment of others. Direct confrontation and straightforwardness are the shortcut and the most successful way to reach a clear objective. Direct confrontation concerning the Palestinian problem, and tackling it in one single language with a view to achieving a durable and just peace, lie in the establishment of their state. With all the guarantees you demand, there should be no fear of a newlyborn state that needs the assistance of all countries of the world. When the bells of peace ring, there will be no hands to beat the drums of war. Even if they existed, they would be soundless.

Conceive with me a peace agreement in Geneva that we would herald to a world thirsty for peace, a peace agreement based on the following points:

First: ending the Israeli occupation of the Arab territories occupied in 1967.

Second: achievement of the fundamental rights of the Palestinian People and their right to self-determination, including their right to establish their own state.

Third: the right of all states in the area to live in peace within their boundaries, which will be secure and guaranteed through procedures to be agreed upon, which provide appropriate security to international boundaries, in addition to appropriate international guarantees.

Fourth: commitment of all states in the region to administer the relations among them in accordance with the objectives and principles of the United Nations Charter, particularly the principles concerning the non-resort to force and the solution of differences among them by peaceful means.

Fifth: ending the state of belligerency in the region.

Ladies and gentlemen, peace is not the mere endorsement of written lines; rather, it is a rewriting of history. Peace is not a game of calling for peace to defend certain whims or hide certain ambitions. Peace is a giant struggle against all and every ambition and whim. Perhaps the examples taken from ancient and modern history teach us all that missiles, warships and nuclear weapons cannot establish security. Rather, they destroy what peace and security build. For the sake of our peoples, and for the sake of the civilisations made by man, we have to defend man everywhere against the rule of the force of arms, so that we may endow the rule of humanity with all the power of the values and principles that promote the sublime position of mankind.

Allow me to address my call from this rostrum to the people of Israel. I address myself with true and sincere words to every man, woman and child in Israel.

From the Egyptian people who bless this sacred mission of peace, I convey to you the message of peace, the message of the Egyptian people who do not know fanaticism, and whose sons, Muslims, Christians and Jews, live together in a spirit of cordiality, love and tolerance. This is Egypt whose people have entrusted me with that sacred message, the message of security, safety and peace. To every man, woman and child in Israel, I say: encourage your leadership to struggle for peace. Let all endeavours be channelled towards building a huge edifice for peace, instead of strongholds and hideouts defended by destructive rockets. Introduce to the entire world the image of the new man in this area, so that he might set an example to the man of our age, the man of peace everywhere.

Be the heralds to your sons. Tell them that past wars were the last of wars and the end of sorrows. Tell them that we are in for a new beginning to a new life – the life of love, prosperity, freedom and peace.

You, bewailing mother; you, widowed wife; you, the son who lost a brother or a father; you, all victims of wars – fill the earth and space with recitals of peace. Fill bosoms and hearts with the aspirations of peace. Turn the song into a reality that blossoms and lives. Make hope a code of conduct and endeavour. The will of peoples is part of the will of God.

Ladies and gentlemen, before I came to this place, with every beat of my heart and with every sentiment, I prayed to God Almighty, while performing the Courban Bairam prayers, and while visiting the Holy Sepulchre, to give me strength and to confirm my belief that this visit may achieve the objectives I look forward to, for a happy present and a happier future.

I have chosen to set aside all precedents and traditions known by warring countries, in spite of the fact that occupation of the Arab territories is still there. Rather, the declaration of my readiness to proceed to Israel came as a great surprise that stirred many feelings and astounded many minds. Some opinions even doubted its intent. Despite that, the decision was inspired by all the clarity and purity of belief, and with all the true expression of my people's will and intentions.

And I have chosen this difficult road which is considered, in the opinion of many, the most difficult road. I have chosen to come to you with an open heart and an open mind. I have chosen to give this great impetus to all international efforts exerted for peace. I have chosen to present to you, and in your own home, the realities devoid of any schemes or whims, not to manoeuvre or to win a round, but for us to win together, the most dangerous of rounds and battles in modern history – the battle of permanent peace based on justice.

It is not my battle alone, nor is it the battle of the leadership in Israel alone. It is the battle of all and every citizen in all our territories whose right it is to live in peace. It is the commitment of conscience and responsibility in the hearts of millions.

When I put forward this initiative, many asked what is it that I conceived as possible to achieve during this visit, and what my expectations were. And, as I answered the questioners, I announce before you that I have not thought of carrying out this initiative from the concept of what could be achieved during this visit, but I have come here to deliver a message. I have delivered the message, and may God be my witness.

I repeat with Zechariah, 'Love right and justice.'

I quote the following verses from the holy Koran:

'We believe in God and in what has been revealed to us and what was revealed to Abraham, Ismail, Isaac, Jacob, and the tribes and in the books given to Moses, Jesus, and the prophets from their lord. We make no distinction between one and another among them and to God we submit.'

Prime Minister Paul Keating

Redfern Speech

Delivered in Redfern Park

10 December 1992

Ladies and gentlemen

I am very pleased to be here today at the launch of Australia's celebration of the 1993 International Year of the World's Indigenous People.

It will be a year of great significance for Australia.

It comes at a time when we have committed ourselves to succeeding in the test which so far we have always failed.

Because, in truth, we cannot confidently say that we have succeeded as we would like to have succeeded if we have not managed to extend opportunity and care, dignity and hope to the indigenous people of Australia – the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people.

This is a fundamental test of our social goals and our national will: our ability to say to ourselves and the rest of the world that Australia is a first rate social democracy, that we are what we should be – truly the land of the fair go and the better chance.

There is no more basic test of how seriously we mean these things.

It is a test of our self-knowledge.

Of how well we know the land we live in. How well we know our history.

How well we recognise the fact that, complex as our contemporary identity is, it cannot be separated from Aboriginal Australia.

How well we know what Aboriginal Australians know about Australia.

Redfern is a good place to contemplate these things.

Just a mile or two from the place where the first European settlers landed, in too many ways it tells us that their failure to bring much more than devastation and demoralisation to Aboriginal Australia continues to be our failure.

More I think than most Australians recognise, the plight of Aboriginal Australians affects us all.

In Redfern it might be tempting to think that the reality Aboriginal Australians face is somehow contained here, and that the rest of us are insulated from it.

But of course, while all the dilemmas may exist here, they are far from contained.

We know the same dilemmas and more are faced all over Australia.

That is perhaps the point of this Year of the World's Indigenous People: to bring the dispossessed out of the shadows, to recognise that they are part of us, and that we cannot give indigenous Australians up without giving up many of our own most deeply held values, much of our own identity – and our own humanity.

Nowhere in the world, I would venture, is the message more stark than it is in Australia.

We simply cannot sweep injustice aside. Even if our own conscience allowed us to, I am sure, that in due course, the world and the people of our region would not.

There should be no mistake about this – our success in resolving these issues will have a significant bearing on our standing in the world.

However intractable the problems seem, we cannot resign ourselves to failure – any more than we can hide behind the contemporary version of Social Darwinism which says that to reach back for the poor and dispossessed is to risk being dragged down.

That seems to me not only morally indefensible, but bad history.

We non-Aboriginal Australians should perhaps remind ourselves that Australia once reached out for us.

Didn't Australia provide opportunity and care for the dispossessed Irish? The poor of Britain? The refugees from war and famine and persecution in the countries of Europe and Asia?

Isn't it reasonable to say that if we can build a prosperous and remarkably harmonious multicultural society in Australia, surely we can find just solutions to the problems which beset the first Australians – the people to whom the most injustice has been done.

And, as I say, the starting point might be to recognise that the problem starts with us non-Aboriginal Australians.

It begins, I think, with that act of recognition.

Recognition that it was we who did the dispossessing.

We took the traditional lands and smashed the traditional way of life.

We brought the diseases. The alcohol.

We committed the murders.

We took the children from their mothers.

We practised discrimination and exclusion.

It was our ignorance and our prejudice.

And our failure to imagine these things being done to us.

With some noble exceptions, we failed to make the most basic human response and enter into their hearts and minds.

We failed to ask – how would I feel if this were done to me?

As a consequence, we failed to see that what we were doing degraded all of us.

If we needed a reminder of this, we received it this year.

The Report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody showed with devastating clarity that the past lives on in inequality, racism and injustice.

In the prejudice and ignorance of non-Aboriginal Australians, and in the demoralisation and desperation, the fractured identity, of so many Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders.

For all this, I do not believe that the Report should fill us with guilt.

Down the years, there has been no shortage of guilt, but it has not produced the responses we need.

Guilt is not a very constructive emotion.

I think what we need to do is open our hearts a bit.

All of us.

Perhaps when we recognise what we have in common we will see the things which must be done – the practical things.

There is something of this in the creation of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation.

The Council's mission is to forge a new partnership built on justice and equity and an appreciation of the heritage of Australia's indigenous people.

In the abstract those terms are meaningless.

We have to give meaning to 'justice' and 'equity' – and, as I have said several times this year, we will only give them meaning when we commit ourselves to achieving concrete results.

If we improve the living conditions in one town, they will improve in another. And another.

If we raise the standard of health by twenty per cent one year, it will be raised more the next.

If we open one door others will follow.

When we see improvement, when we see more dignity, more confidence, more happiness – we will know we are going to win.

We need these practical building blocks of change.

The Mabo Judgement should be seen as one of these.

By doing away with the bizarre conceit that this continent had no owners prior to the settlement of Europeans, Mabo establishes a fundamental truth and lays the basis for justice.

It will be much easier to work from that basis than has ever been the case in the past.

For that reason alone we should ignore the isolated outbreaks of hysteria and hostility of the past few months.

Mabo is an historic decision – we can make it an historic turning point, the basis of a new relationship between indigenous and non-Aboriginal Australians.

The message should be that there is nothing to fear or to lose in the recognition of historical truth, or the extension of social justice, or the deepening of Australian social democracy to include indigenous Australians.

There is everything to gain.

Even the unhappy past speaks for this.

Where Aboriginal Australians have been included in the life of Australia they have made remarkable contributions.

Economic contributions, particularly in the pastoral and agricultural industry.

They are there in the frontier and exploration history of Australia.

They are there in the wars.

In sport to an extraordinary degree.

In literature and art and music.

In all these things they have shaped our knowledge of this continent and of ourselves. They have shaped our identity.

They are there in the Australian legend.

We should never forget – they have helped build this nation.

And if we have a sense of justice, as well as common sense, we will forge a new partnership.

As I said, it might help us if we non-Aboriginal Australians imagined ourselves dispossessed of land we had lived on for fifty thousand years – and then imagined ourselves told that it had never been ours.

Imagine if ours was the oldest culture in the world and we were told that it was worthless.

Imagine if we had resisted this settlement, suffered and died in the defence of our land, and then were told in history books that we had given up without a fight.

Imagine if non-Aboriginal Australians had served their country in peace and war and were then ignored in history books.

Imagine if our feats on sporting fields had inspired admiration and patriotism and yet did nothing to diminish prejudice.

Imagine if our spiritual life was denied and ridiculed.

Imagine if we had suffered the injustice and then were blamed for it.

It seems to me that if we can imagine the injustice we can imagine its opposite.

And we can have justice.

I say that for two reasons:

I say it because I believe that the great things about Australian social democracy reflect a fundamental belief in justice.

And I say it because in so many other areas we have proved our capacity over the years to go on extending the realms of participation, opportunity and care.

Just as Australians living in the relatively narrow and insular Australia of the 1960s imagined a culturally diverse, worldly and open Australia, and in a generation turned the idea into reality, so we can turn the goals of reconciliation into reality.

There are very good signs that the process has begun.

The creation of the Reconciliation Council is evidence itself.

The establishment of the ATSIC – the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission – is also evidence.

The Council is the product of imagination and good will.

ATSIC emerges from the vision of indigenous self-determination and self-management.

The vision has already become the reality of almost 800 elected Aboriginal Regional Councillors and Commissioners determining priorities and developing their own programs.

All over Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are taking charge of their own lives.

And assistance with the problems which chronically beset them is at last being made available in ways developed by the communities themselves.

If these things offer hope, so does the fact that this generation of Australians is better informed about Aboriginal culture and achievement, and about the injustice that has been done, than any generation before.

We are beginning to more generally appreciate the depth and the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.

From their music and art and dance we are beginning to recognise how much richer our national life and identity will be for the participation of Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders.

We are beginning to learn what the indigenous people have known for many thousands of years – how to live with our physical environment.

Ever so gradually we are learning how to see Australia through Aboriginal eyes, beginning to recognise the wisdom contained in their epic story.

I think we are beginning to see how much we owe the indigenous Australians and how much we have lost by living so apart.

I said we non-indigenous Australians should try to imagine the Aboriginal view.

It can't be too hard. Someone imagined this event today, and it is now a marvellous reality and a great reason for hope.

There is one thing today we cannot imagine.

We cannot imagine that the descendants of people whose genius and resilience maintained a culture here through fifty thousand years or more, through cataclysmic changes to the climate and environment, and who then survived two centuries of dispossession and abuse, will be denied their place in the modern Australian nation.

We cannot imagine that.

We cannot imagine that we will fail.

And with the spirit that is here today I am confident that we won't.

I am confident that we will succeed in this decade.

Thank you

Reproduced with permission of The Hon. PJ Keating.

Margaret Atwood

'Spotty-Handed Villainesses'

From a speech given in various versions, here and there, in 1994

... My title is 'Spotty-Handed Villainesses'; my subtitle is, 'Problems of Female Bad Behaviour in the Creation of Literature'. I should probably have said, 'in the creation of novels, plays and epic poems'. Female bad behaviour occurs in lyric poems, of course, but not at sufficient length.

I began to think about this subject at a very early age. There was a children's rhyme that went:

There was a little girl
Who had a little curl
Right in the middle of her forehead;
When she was good, she was very, very good,
And when she was bad, she was horrid!

No doubt this is a remnant of the Angel/Whore split so popular among the Victorians, but at the age of five I did not know that. I took this to be a poem of personal significance – I did after all have curls – and it brought home to me the deeply Jungian possibilities of a Dr Jekyll–Mr Hyde double life for women. My older brother used this verse to tease me, or so he thought. He did manage to make 'very, very good' sound almost worse than 'horrid', which remains an accurate analysis for the novelist. Create a flawless character and you create an insufferable one; which may be why I am interested in spots.

Some of you may wonder whether the spotty-handedness in my title refers to age spots. Was my lecture perhaps going to centre on that once-forbidden but now red-hot topic, The Menopause, without which any collection of female-obilia would be incomplete? I hasten to point out that my title is not age-related; it refers neither to age spots nor to youth spots. Instead it recalls that most famous of spots, the invisible but indelible one on the hand of wicked Lady Macbeth. Spot as in guilt, spot as in blood, spot as in 'out, damned'. Lady Macbeth was spotted, Ophelia unspotted; both came to sticky ends, but there's a world of difference.

But is it not, today – well, somehow unfeminist – to depict a woman behaving badly? Isn't bad behaviour supposed to be the monopoly of men? Isn't that what we are expected – in defiance of real life – to somehow believe, now? When bad women get into literature, what are they doing there, and are they permissible, and what, if anything, do we need them for?

We do need something like them; by which I mean, something disruptive to static order. When my daughter was five, she and her friend Heather announced that they were putting on a play. We were conscripted as the audience. We took our seats, expecting to see something of note. The play opened with two characters having breakfast. This was promising – an Ibsenian play perhaps, or something by GB Shaw? Shakespeare is not big on breakfast openings, but other playwrights of talent have not disdained them.

The play progressed. The two characters had more breakfast. Then they had more. They passed each other the jam, the cornflakes, the toast. Each asked if the other would like a cup of tea. What was going on? Was this Pinter, perhaps, or Ionesco, or maybe Andy Warhol? The audience grew restless. 'Are you going to do anything except have breakfast?' we said. 'No,' they said. 'Then it isn't a play,' we said. 'Something else has to happen.'

And there you have it, the difference between literature – at least literature as embodied in plays and novels – and life. Something else has to happen. In life we may ask for nothing more than a kind of eternal breakfast – it happens to be my favourite meal, and certainly it is

the most hopeful one, since we don't yet know what atrocities the day may choose to visit upon us – but if we are going to sit still for two or three hours in a theatre, or wade through two or three hundred pages of a book, we certainly expect something more than breakfast.

What kind of something? It can be an earthquake, a tempest, an attack by Martians, the discovery that your spouse is having an affair; or, if the author is hyperactive, all of these at once. Or it can be the revelation of the spottiness of a spotty woman. I'll get around to these disreputable folks shortly, but first let me go over some essentials which may be insulting to your intelligence, but which are comforting to mine, because they help me to focus on what I'm doing as a creator of fictions. If you think I'm flogging a few dead horses – horses which have been put out of their pain long ago – let me assure you that this is because the horses are not in fact dead, but are out there in the world, galloping around as vigorously as ever.

How do I know this? I read my mail. Also, I listen to the questions people ask me, both in interviews and after public readings. The kinds of questions I'm talking about have to do with how the characters in novels ought to behave. Unfortunately, there is a widespread tendency to judge such characters as if they were job applicants, or public servants, or prospective roommates, or somebody you're considering marrying. For instance, I sometimes get a question – almost always, these days, from women – that goes something like, 'Why don't you make the men stronger?' I feel that this is a matter which should more properly be taken up with God. It was not, after all, I who created Adam so subject to temptation that he sacrificed eternal life for an apple; which leads me to believe that God – who is, among other things, an author – is just as enamoured of character flaws and dire plots as we human writers are. The characters in the average novel are not usually folks you would want to get involved with at a personal or business level. How then should we go about responding to such creations? Or, from my side of the page, which is blank when I begin – how should I go about creating them?

What is a novel, anyway? Only a very foolish person would attempt to give a definitive answer to that, beyond stating the more or less obvious facts that it is a literary narrative of some length which purports, on the reverse of the title page, not to be true, but seeks nevertheless to convince its readers that it is. It's typical of the cynicism of our age that, if you write a novel, everyone assumes it's about real people, thinly disguised; but if you write an autobiography everyone assumes you're lying your head off. Part of this is right, because every artist is, among other things, a con-artist.

We con-artists do tell the truth, in a way; but, as Emily Dickinson said, we tell it slant. By indirection we find direction out – so here, for easy reference, is an elimination-dance list of what novels are not.

Novels are not sociological textbooks, although they may contain social comment and criticism.

Novels are not political tracts, although 'politics' – in the sense of human power structures – is inevitably one of their subjects. But if the author's main design on us is to convert us to something – whether that something be Christianity, capitalism, a belief in marriage as the only answer to a maiden's prayer, or feminism, we are likely to sniff it out, and to rebel. As André Gide once remarked, 'It is with noble sentiments that bad literature gets written.'

Novels are not how-to books; they will not show you how to conduct a successful life, although some of them may be read this way. Is *Pride and Prejudice* about how a sensible middle-class nineteenth-century woman can snare an appropriate man with a good income, which is the best she can hope for out of life, given the limitations of her situation? Partly. But not completely.

Novels are not, primarily, moral tracts. Their characters are not all models of good behaviour – or, if they are, we probably won't read them. But they are linked with notions of morality, because they are about human beings and human beings divide behaviour into good and bad. The characters judge each other, and the reader judges the characters. However, the

success of a novel does not depend on a 'Not Guilty' verdict from the reader. As Keats said, Shakespeare took as much delight in creating Iago – that arch-villain – as he did in creating the virtuous Imogen. I would say probably more, and the proof of it is that I'd bet you're more likely to know which play Iago is in.

But although a novel is not a political tract, a how-to book, a sociology textbook or a pattern of correct morality, it is also not merely a piece of Art for Art's Sake, divorced from real life. It cannot do without a conception of form and a structure, true, but its roots are in the mud; its flowers, if any, come out of the rawness of its raw materials.

In short, novels are ambiguous and multi-faceted, not because they're perverse, but because they attempt to grapple with what was once referred to as the human condition, and they do so using a medium which is notoriously slippery – namely, language itself.

Now, let's get back to the notion that in a novel, something else has to happen – other than breakfast, that is. What will that 'something else' be, and how does the novelist go about choosing it? Usually it's backwards to what you were taught in school, where you probably got the idea that the novelist had an overall scheme or idea and then went about colouring it in with characters and words, sort of like paint-by-numbers. But in reality the process is much more like wrestling a greased pig in the dark.

Literary critics start with a nice, clean, already-written text. They then address questions to this text, which they attempt to answer; 'what does it mean' being both the most basic and the most difficult. Novelists, on the other hand, start with the blank page, to which they similarly address questions. But the questions are different. Instead of asking, first of all, 'what does it mean', they work at the widget level; they ask, 'Is this the right word?' 'What does it mean' can only come when there is an 'it' to mean something. Novelists have to get some actual words down before they can fiddle with the theology. Or, to put it another way: God started with chaos – dark, without form and void – and so does the novelist. Then God made one detail at a time. So does the novelist. On the seventh day, God took a break to consider what he'd done. So does the novelist. But the critic starts on Day Seven.

The critic, looking at plot, asks, 'What's happening here?' The novelist, creating plot, asks, 'What happens next?' The critic asks, 'Is this believable?' The novelist, 'How can I get them to believe this?' The novelist, echoing Marshall McLuhan's famous dictum that art is what you can get away with, says, 'How can I pull this off?' – as if the novel itself were a kind of bank robbery. Whereas the critic is liable to exclaim, in the mode of the policeman making the arrest, 'Aha! You can't get away with that!'

In short, the novelist's concerns are more practical than those of the critic; more concerned with 'how to', less concerned with metaphysics. Any novelist – whatever his or her theoretical interests – has to contend with the following how-to questions:

- What kind of story shall I choose to tell? Is it, for instance, comic or tragic or melodramatic, or all?
- How shall I tell it?
- Who will be at the centre of it, and will this person be a) admirable or b) not?
- And – more important than it may sound – will it have a happy ending, or not?

No matter what you are writing – what genre and in what style, whether cheap formula or high-minded experiment – you will still have to answer – in the course of your writing – these essential questions. Any story you tell must have a conflict of some sort, and it must have suspense. In other words: something other than breakfast.

Let's put a woman at the centre of the something-other-than-breakfast, and see what happens. Now there is a whole new set of questions. Will the conflict be supplied by the natural world? Is our female protagonist lost in the jungle, caught in a hurricane, pursued by sharks? If so, the story will be an adventure story and her job is to run away, or else to combat the sharks, displaying courage and fortitude, or else cowardice and stupidity. If there

is a man in the story as well, the plot will alter in other directions: he will be a rescuer, an enemy, a companion in struggle, a sex bomb, or someone rescued by the woman. Once upon a time, the first would have been more probable, that is, more believable to the reader; but times have changed and art is what you can get away with, and the other possibilities have now entered the picture.

Stories about space invasions are similar, in that the threat comes from outside and the goal for the character, whether achieved or not, is survival. War stories per se – ditto, in that the main threat is external. Vampire and werewolf stories are more complicated, as are ghost stories; in these, the threat is from outside, true, but the threatening thing may also conceal a split-off part of the character's own psyche. Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw* and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* are in large part animated by such hidden agendas; and both revolve around notions of female sexuality. Once all werewolves were male, and female vampires were usually mere sidekicks; but there are now female werewolves, and women are moving in on the star bloodsucking roles as well. Whether this is good or bad news I hesitate to say.

Detective and espionage stories may combine many elements, but would not be what they are without a crime, a criminal, a tracking-down, and a revelation at the end; again, all sleuths were once male, but sleuthesses are now prominent, for which I hope they lay a votive ball of wool from time to time upon the tomb of the sainted Miss Marple. We live in an age not only of gender crossover but of genre crossover, so you can throw all of the above into the cauldron and stir.

Then there are stories classed as 'serious' literature, which centre not on external threats – although some of these may exist – but on relationships among the characters. To avoid the eternal breakfast, some of the characters must cause problems for some of the others. This is where the questions really get difficult. As I've said, the novel has its roots in the mud, and part of the mud is history; and part of the history we've had recently is the history of the women's movement, and the women's movement has influenced how people read, and therefore what you can get away with, in art.

Some of this influence has been beneficial. Whole areas of human life that were once considered non-literary or sub-literary – such as the problematical nature of homemaking, the hidden depths of motherhood, and of daughterhood as well, the once-forbidden realms of incest and child abuse – have been brought inside the circle that demarcates the writeable from the non-writeable. Other things, such as the Cinderella happy ending – the Prince Charming one – have been called into question. (As one lesbian writer remarked to me, the only happy ending she found believable any more was the one in which girl meets girl and ends up with girl; but that was fifteen years ago, and the bloom is off even that romantic rose.)

To keep you from being too depressed, let me emphasise that none of this means that you, personally, cannot find happiness with a good man, a good woman or a good pet canary; just as the creation of a bad female character doesn't mean that women should lose the vote. If bad male characters meant that, for men, all men would be disenfranchised immediately. We are talking about what you can get away with in art; that is, what you can make believable. When Shakespeare wrote his sonnets to his dark-haired mistress, he wasn't saying that blondes were ugly, he was merely pushing against the notion that only blondes were beautiful. The tendency of innovative literature is to include the hitherto excluded, which often has the effect of rendering ludicrous the conventions that have just preceded the innovation. So the form of the ending, whether happy or not, does not have to do with how people live their lives – there is a great deal of variety in that department (and, after all, in life every story ends with death, which is not true of novels). Instead it's connected with what literary conventions the writer is following or pulling apart at the moment. Happy endings of the Cinderella kind do exist in stories, of course, but they have been relegated largely to genre fiction, such as Harlequin romances.

To summarise some of the benefits to literature of the Women's Movement – the expansion of the territory available to writers, both in character and in language; a sharp-eyed examination of the way power works in gender relations, and the exposure of much of this as socially constructed; a vigorous exploration of many hitherto-concealed areas of experience. But as with any political movement which comes out of real oppression – and I do emphasise the real – there was also, in the first decade at least of the present movement, a tendency to cookie-cut: that is, to write to a pattern and to oversugar on one side. Some writers tended to polarise morality by gender – that is, women were intrinsically good and men bad; to divide along allegiance lines – that is, women who slept with men were sleeping with the enemy; to judge by tribal markings – that is, women who wore high heels and makeup were instantly suspect, those in overalls were acceptable; and to make hopeful excuses: that is, defects in women were ascribable to the patriarchal system and would cure themselves once that system was abolished. Such oversimplifications may be necessary to some phases of political movements. But they are usually problematical for novelists, unless the novelist has a secret desire to be in billboard advertising.

If a novelist writing at that time was also a feminist, she felt her choices restricted. Were all heroines to be essentially spotless of soul – struggling against, fleeing from or done in by male oppression? Was the only plot to be *The Perils of Pauline*, with a lot of moustache-twirling villains but minus the rescuing hero? Did suffering prove you were good? (If so – think hard about this – wasn't it all for the best that women did so much of it?) Did we face a situation in which women could do no wrong, but could only have wrong done to them? Were women being confined yet again to that alabaster pedestal so beloved of the Victorian age, when Woman as better-than-man gave men a licence to be gleefully and enjoyably worse than women, while all the while proclaiming that they couldn't help it because it was their nature? Were women to be condemned to virtue for life, slaves in the salt-mines of goodness? How intolerable.

Of course, the feminist analysis made some kinds of behaviour available to female characters which, under the old dispensation – the pre-feminist one – would have been considered bad, but under the new one were praiseworthy. A female character could rebel against social strictures without then having to throw herself in front of a train like Anna Karenina; she could think the unthinkable and say the unsayable; she could flout authority. She could do new bad-good things, such as leaving her husband and even deserting her children. Such activities and emotions, however, were – according to the new moral thermometer of the times – not really bad at all; they were good, and the women who did them were praiseworthy. I'm not against such plots. I just don't think they are the only ones.

And there were certain new no-no's. For instance: was it at all permissible, any more, to talk about women's will to power, because weren't women supposed by nature to be communal egalitarians? Could one depict the scurvy behaviour often practised by women against one another, or by little girls against other little girls? Could one examine the Seven Deadly Sins in their female versions – to remind you, Pride, Anger, Lust, Envy, Avarice, Greed and Sloth – without being considered anti-feminist? Or was a mere mention of such things tantamount to aiding and abetting the enemy, namely the male power-structure? Were we to have a warning hand clapped over our mouths, yet once again, to prevent us from saying the unsayable – though the unsayable had changed? Were we to listen to our mothers, yet once again, as they intoned – 'If You Can't Say Anything Nice, Don't Say Anything At All'? Hadn't men been giving women a bad reputation for centuries? Shouldn't we form a wall of silence around the badness of women, or at best explain it away by saying it was the fault of Big Daddy, or – permissible too, it seems – of Big Mom? Big Mom, that agent of the patriarchy, that pronatalist, got it in the neck from certain seventies feminists; though mothers were admitted into the fold again once some of these women turned into them. In a word: were women to be homogenised – one woman is the same as another – and deprived of free will – as in, 'the patriarchy made her do it'?

Or, in another word – were men to get all the juicy parts? Literature cannot do without bad behaviour, but was all the bad behaviour to be reserved for men? Was it to be all Iago and Mephistopheles, and were Jezebel and Medea and Medusa and Delilah and Regan and Goneril and spotty-handed Lady Macbeth and Rider Haggard's powerful superfemme fatale in *She*, and Tony Morrison's mean Sula, to be banished from view? I hope not. Women characters, arise! Take back the night! In particular, take back the Queen of the Night, from Mozart's *Magic Flute*. It's a great part, and due for revision.

I have always known that there were spellbinding evil parts for women. For one thing, I was taken at an early age to see *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. Never mind the Protestant work ethic of the dwarfs. Never mind the tedious housework-is-virtuous motif. Never mind the fact that Snow White is a vampire – anyone who lies in a glass coffin without decaying and then comes to life again must be. The truth is that I was paralysed by the scene in which the evil queen drinks the magic potion and changes her shape. What power, what untold possibilities!

Also, I was exposed to the complete, unexpurgated *Grimm's Fairy Tales* at an impressionable age. Fairy tales had a bad reputation among feminists for a while – partly because they'd been cleaned up, on the erroneous supposition that little children don't like gruesome gore, and partly because they'd been selected to fit the fifties 'Prince Charming Is Your Goal' ethos. So *Cinderella* and *Sleeping Beauty* were okay, though *The Youth Who Set Out to Learn What Fear Was*, which featured a good many rotting corpses, plus a woman who was smarter than her husband, were not. But many of these tales were originally told and retold by women, and these unknown women left their mark. There is a wide range of heroines in these tales; passive good girls, yes, but adventurous, resourceful women as well, and proud ones, and slothful ones, and foolish ones, and envious and greedy ones, and also many wise women and a variety of evil witches, both in disguise and not, and bad stepmothers and wicked ugly sisters and false brides as well. The stories, and the figures themselves, have immense vitality, partly because no punches are pulled – in the versions I read, the barrels of nails and the red-hot shoes were left intact – and also because no emotion is unrepresented. Singly, the female characters are limited and two-dimensional. But put all together, they form a rich five-dimensional picture.

Female characters who behave badly can of course be used as sticks to beat other women – though so can female characters who behave well, witness the cult of the Virgin Mary, better than you'll ever be, and the legends of the female saints and martyrs – just cut on the dotted line, and, minus one body part, there's your saint, and the only really good woman is a dead woman, so if you're so good why aren't you dead?

But female bad characters can also act as keys to doors we need to open, and as mirrors in which we can see more than just a pretty face. They can be explorations of moral freedom – because everyone's choices are limited, and women's choices have been more limited than men's, but that doesn't mean women can't make choices. Such characters can pose the question of responsibility, because if you want power you have to accept responsibility, and actions produce consequences. I'm not suggesting an agenda here, just some possibilities; nor am I prescribing, just wondering. If there's a closed-off road, the curious speculate about why it's closed off, and where it might lead if followed; and evil women have been, for a while recently, a somewhat closed-off road, at least for fiction-writers.

While pondering these matters, I thought back over the numerous bad female literary characters I have known, and tried to sort them into categories. If you were doing this on a blackboard, you might set up a kind of grid: bad women who do bad things for bad reasons, good women who do good things for good reasons, good women who do bad things for good reasons, bad women who do bad things for good reasons, and so forth. But a grid would just be a beginning, because there are so many factors involved: for instance, what the character thinks is bad, what the reader thinks is bad, and what the author thinks is bad, may all be different. But let me define a thoroughly evil person as

one who intends to do evil, and for purely selfish reasons. The Queen in *Snow White* would fit that.

So would Regan and Goneril, Lear's evil daughters; very little can be said in their defence, except that they seem to have been against the patriarchy. Lady Macbeth, however, did her wicked murder for a conventionally acceptable reason, one that would win approval for her in corporate business circles – she was furthering her husband's career. She pays the corporate-wife price, too – she subdues her own nature, and has a nervous breakdown as a result. Similarly, Jezebel was merely trying to please a sulky husband; he refused to eat his dinner until he got hold of Naboth's vineyard, so Jezebel had its owner bumped off. Wifely devotion, as I say. The amount of sexual baggage that has accumulated around this figure is astounding, since she doesn't do anything remotely sexual in the original story, except put on makeup.

The story of Medea, whose husband Jason married a new princess, and who then poisoned the bride and murdered her own two children, has been interpreted in various ways. In some versions Medea is a witch and commits infanticide out of revenge; but the play by Euripides is surprisingly neo-feminist. There's quite a lot about how tough it is to be a woman, and Medea's motivation is commendable – she doesn't want her children to fall into hostile hands and be cruelly abused – which is also the situation of the child-killing mother in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. A good woman, then, who does a bad thing for a good reason. Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* kills her nasty lover due to sexual complications; here too we are in the realm of female-as-victim, doing a bad thing for a good reason. (Which, I suppose, places such stories right beside the front page, along with women who kill their abusive husbands. According to a recent *Time* story, the average jail sentence in the U.S. for men who kill their wives is four years, but for women who kill their husbands – no matter what the provocation – it's twenty. (For those who think equality is already with us, I leave the statistics to speak for themselves.)

These women characters are all murderers. Then there are the seducers; here again, the motive varies. I have to say too that with the change in sexual mores, the mere seduction of a man no longer rates very high on the sin scale. But try asking a number of women what the worst thing is that a woman friend could possibly do to them. Chances are the answer will involve the theft of a sexual partner.

Some famous seductresses have really been patriotic espionage agents. Delilah, for instance, was an early Mata Hari, working for the Philistines, trading sex for military information. Judith, who all but seduced the enemy general Holofernes and then cut off his head and brought it home in a sack, was treated as a heroine, although she has troubled men's imaginations through the centuries – witness the number of male painters who have depicted her – because she combines sex with violence in a way they aren't accustomed to and don't much like. Then there are figures like Hawthorne's adulterous Hester Prynne, she of *The Scarlet Letter*, who becomes a kind of sex-saint through suffering – we assume she did what she did through Love, and thus she becomes a good woman who did a bad thing for a good reason – and Madame Bovary, who not only indulged her romantic temperament and voluptuous sensual appetites, but spent too much of her husband's money doing it, which was her downfall. A good course in double-entry bookkeeping would have saved the day. I suppose she is a foolish woman who did a stupid thing for an insufficient reason, since the men in question were dolts. Neither the modern reader nor the author consider her very evil, though many contemporaries did, as you can see if you read the transcript of the court case in which the forces of moral rectitude tried to get the book censored.

One of my favourite bad women is Becky Sharpe, of Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*. She makes no pretensions to goodness. She is wicked, she enjoys being wicked, and she does it out of vanity and for her own profit, tricking and deluding English society in the process – which, the author implies, deserves to be tricked and deluded, since it is hypocritical and selfish to the core. Becky, like Undine Spragg in Edith Wharton's *The Custom of the Country*, is an

adventuress; she lives by her wits and uses men as ambulatory bank-accounts. Many literary adventurers are male – consider Thomas Mann's *Felix Krull*, *Confidence Man* – but it does make a difference if you change the gender. For one thing, the nature of the loot changes. For a male adventurer, the loot is money and women; but for a female one, the loot is money and men.

Becky Sharpe is a bad mother too, and that's a whole other subject – bad mothers and wicked stepmothers and oppressive aunts, like the one in *Jane Eyre*, and nasty female teachers, and depraved governesses, and evil grannies. The possibilities are many.

But I think that's enough reprehensible female behaviour for you today. Life is short, art is long, motives are complex, and human nature is endlessly fascinating. Many doors stand ajar; others beg to be unlocked. What is in the forbidden room? Something different for everyone, but something you need to know and will never find out unless you step across the threshold. If you are a man, the bad female character in a novel may be – in Jungian terms – your anima; but if you're a woman, the bad female character is your shadow; and as we know from the Offenbach opera *Tales of Hoffman*, she who loses her shadow also loses her soul.

Evil women are necessary in story traditions for two much more obvious reasons, of course. First, they exist in life, so why shouldn't they exist in literature? Second – which may be another way of saying the same thing – women have more to them than virtue. They are fully dimensional human beings; they too have subterranean depths; why shouldn't their many-dimensionality be given literary expression? And when it is, female readers do not automatically recoil in horror. In Aldous Huxley's novel *Point Counter Point*, Lucy Tantamount, the man-destroying vamp, is preferred by the other female characters to the earnest, snivelling woman whose man she has reduced to a wet bath sponge. As one of them says, 'Lucy's obviously a force. You may not like that kind of force. But you can't help admiring the force in itself. It's like Niagara.' In other words, awesome. Or, as one Englishwoman said to me recently, 'Women are tired of being good all the time.'

I will leave you with a final quotation. It's from Dame Rebecca West, speaking in 1912 – 'Ladies of Great Britain ... we have not enough evil in us.'

Note where she locates the desired evil. In us.

'Spotty-Handed Villainesses' from *Curious Pursuits* by Margaret Atwood. Reproduced by permission of Little Brown Book Limited.

Noel Pearson

‘An Australian history for us all’

Address to the Chancellor’s Club Dinner
University of Western Sydney
20 November 1996

Chancellor, distinguished guests. It is my honour to have been invited to speak this evening on some questions about Australian history that are presently at fundamental issue in this country. I had the great privilege to have been taught history at the University of Sydney by Professor Schreuder, who was for me inspirational and I hope that the University of Western Sydney has shared that pleasure. I was therefore delighted to accept his invitation, but alas I cannot promise my teacher’s rigour. I come only with some observations about how our popular understanding of the colonial past is central to the moral and political turbulence we are still grappling with as Australians.

I fear however that I am in danger of indulging in agonising navel-gazing about who we are and conducting what Prime Minister John Howard calls the perpetual seminar for elite opinion about our national identity. I will nevertheless persevere.

It is very clear that guilt about Australia’s colonial history is what the Americans would call a hot button issue in the Australian community. It has been a hot button for some time now. You would not need to be a political genius to bet that the guilt issue is one of the keenest buttons that the Federal Member for Oxley and her followers in our national government have pressed, and with great electoral resonance.

The polls will tell you this: most ordinary Australians are offended by any suggestion that they should feel guilty about any aspects of the country’s past. They vehemently reject any responsibility for it. Many will reject any notion that some of the legacies of the past live in the present and need to be dealt with. They will say that Aborigines must stop being victims and ‘should get over it, it’s all in the past, we had nothing to do with it, we are not guilty, help yourselves’. Others still will say ‘it’s all in the past, we had nothing to do with it, we are not guilty but we are willing to help alleviate your present condition’.

In his Sir Robert Menzies Lecture this week, Prime Minister John Howard supported these views, views that are held overwhelmingly by the majority of ordinary Australians. He characterises the recent historiography of colonial relations and the discussion of Australian history during the Labor ascendancy as having been altogether too pessimistic. Following Professor Geoffrey Blainey’s description of the ‘black armband view of history’ John Howard implies that a history has been cultivated by the politically-correct classes which urges guilt and shame upon Australians about the national past.

Earlier the Prime Minister said on the John Laws radio program in Sydney:

‘I sympathise fundamentally with Australians who are insulted when they are told that we have a racist, bigoted past. Australians are told that quite regularly. Our children are taught that ... some of the school curricula go close to teaching children that we have a racist, bigoted past. Of course we treated Aborigines very, very badly in the past – very, very badly – but to tell children whose parents were no part of that maltreatment, to tell children who themselves have been no part of it, that we’re all part of a sort of racist, bigoted history is something that Australians reject.’

There is no doubt in my mind that the Prime Minister’s characterisation of the historiography that has developed over the past twenty-five years, and the particularly lively discourse in the wake of the High Court’s decision in the Mabo Case, which judgment canvassed the legal and moral implications of this history, is a characterisation that resonates with the instincts and feelings of ordinary Australians.

It is now well understood that up until the 1960s there was, in the writing and indeed teaching of Australian history, the historiographical equivalent of *terra nullius*: a history that denied or ignored the true facts of the colonial frontier. This was what the late Professor Bill Stanner called the Great Australian Silence. In what I consider to be a truly masterpiece lecture series for the Boyer in 1968, Professor Stanner said:

‘... inattention on such a scale cannot possibly be explained by absent-mindedness. It is a structural matter, a view from a window which has been carefully placed to exclude a whole quadrant of the landscape. What may well have begun as a simple forgetting of other possible views turned under habit and over time into something like a cult of forgetfulness practised on a national scale ... the Great Australian Silence reigns; the story of the things we were unconsciously resolved not to discuss with them or treat with them about.’

The popular, Anglo-Celtic story of Australia’s past was seriously distorted by significant omissions and by some straight out fictions, such as the fiction of ‘peaceful settlement’. The certitude with which history and the humanities generally proclaimed the myth of *terra nullius* meant that the legal invisibility of Aboriginal people and a steadfast belief in our inhumanity was embedded into popular belief.

On the writing of colonial history in North America, Robert Hughes pertinently advises:

‘The reading of history is never static. Revise we historians must. There is no such thing as the last word. And who could doubt that there is still much to revise in the story of the European conquest of North and South America that we inherited? Its scheme was imperial: the epic advance of Civilisation against Barbarism: the conquistador brings the Cross and the Sword, the red man shrinks back before the cavalry and the railroad. Manifest Destiny. The white American myth of the nineteenth century. The notion that all historians propagated this triumphalist myth uncritically is quite false: you have only to read Parkman or Prescott to realise that. But after the myth sank from the histories deep into popular culture, it became a potent justification for the plunder, murder and enslavement of peoples and the wreckage of nature.’

However, there is now accumulated a new Australian history, to which Professor Blainey has also contributed, which tells the story of the other side of the frontier. The contributions of Professor Henry Reynolds and his colleagues at James Cook University which has been a powerhouse of Australian frontier history, along with the oral histories of Aboriginal people, have illuminated aspects of the Australian past that had previously been buried. The national narrative now recognises and incorporates Aboriginal achievement, death and sacrifice.

It is this narrative that was substantially adopted by the judges of the High Court of Australia in their historical survey in the Mabo Case. The judges did not just dwell on the legal implications of the recognition of native title by the common law of Australia, they canvassed the historical consequences of this conclusion and its moral implications. There are at least two explicit moral implications put forward by the judges.

Firstly, Justices Deane and Gaudron said that the failure of the law to recognise the rights of Indigenous peoples to their traditional homelands which led to their death and dispersal left the country with ‘a legacy of unutterable shame’.

Secondly, Justice Brennan (as he then was) said that the dispossession of the Aboriginal inhabitants ‘underwrote the development of the nation’.

These are two brief but critical observations made by our nation’s highest court, when confronted with questions about the country’s colonial past and the belated accommodation of Indigenous people in the present. These are the key instances when the Court ventured beyond its role in declaring our common law, and suggested some moral leadership.

It is very clear from what the Prime Minister and his Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Senator John Herron, have said about these matters, that they do not deny the depredations against

Aboriginal people that are illuminated by the new Australian history. John Howard said: 'Injustices were done in Australia and no one should obscure or minimise them.'

Clearly then the debate today is not so much about the facts of the past. There is generally common ground about them. The debate is about how Australians should respond to the past. The Prime Minister puts his view very clearly, he said:

'... in understanding these realities our priority should not be to apportion blame and guilt for historic wrongs but to commit to a practical program of action that will remove the enduring legacies of disadvantage.'

Senator Herron said in his Enid Lyons Memorial Lecture recently:

'I also believe that a clear distinction must be made between the importance of acknowledging the injustices of the past and the need to secure an admission of guilt for those injustices. I do not believe that most Australians feel individual guilt about these injustices, for the simple fact that they took no direct part in them ... Certainly, as a nation, we have a responsibility to be frank and forthright about those aspects of our history that are not always palatable, and importantly to learn from the mistakes that have been made. However true reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians is not about assigning guilt for the actions of our forbears. Rather it is about achieving an appropriate balance between acknowledging and respecting the lingering pain from past injustices and acting decisively to ensure full equality of opportunity in the future.'

At the height of the native title debate in 1993, in a speech to the Endeavour Foundation, the then Leader of the Federal Opposition, Dr John Hewson, applied his own faculties to these questions and remarked that: 'A divisive debate over issues long gone should never be preferred to a unifying search for common ground.'

In my Hancock Memorial Lecture I argued that it should not be necessary for the truth to be distorted in order for white Australians to be able to live with themselves. Dr Hewson's suggestion was that the truth about the past should suffer in the name of a united Australia. The situation is entirely the reverse. It seems to me that the psychological unity of this country depends upon our taking responsibility for the future by dealing with the past. Anything less is simply evasion of reality.

I said that there was every indication that Australia is mature enough to deal with these questions: how do we explain the past to our children? How do we locate ourselves as Australians in relation to the diverse traditions and experiences that comprise our combined heritage?

How do we as Indigenous people respond to the legacy of colonialism and that brutal, troubled, culture by which we were dispossessed? Do we reject it outright, and furthermore, do we require Anglo-Celtic Australians to spurn their origins in the name of penance and of solidarity with us?

I argued that such a response to our history is quite inappropriate, now when at last we may be approaching a state of 'live and let live' in this country. It is at odds with the quest to discover 'what unites us' as well as 'what separates us'. There is an extent to which I agree with Robert Hughes when he observed:

'The need for absolute goodies and absolute baddies runs deep in us, but it drags history into propaganda and denies the humanity of the dead: their sins, their virtues, their efforts, their failures. To preserve complexity and not flatten it under the weight of anachronistic moralising, is part of the historian's task ...'

I argued that we need to appreciate the complexity of the past and not reduce history to a shallow field of point scoring. I believe that there is much that is worth preserving in the cultural heritage of our dispossessors, much that I for one would be loath to repudiate and much that has also become ours, not necessarily by imposition but by appropriation.

I said that contrary to the propaganda of colonialism, which justifies our dispossession through neo-Darwinian arguments that Aboriginal cultures were doomed to extinction due to our innate inability to 'progress', our cultures are resilient and adaptable. We have taken from you and we should not belittle ourselves by contending that we have had no choice in the matter. The reverse is also of course true. You have taken from us not just our land and not just all of the icons of Indigenous Australia, but some of our ways of approaching things have become an inescapable part of Australia's national mythology. This cultural interface has not been entirely woeful.

But has the so-called black armband view of history been about apportioning guilt?

In his speech at Redfern Park in December 1992, the then Prime Minister Paul Keating said this about guilt:

'Down the years, there has been no shortage of guilt, but it has not produced the responses we need. Guilt is not a very constructive emotion. I think what we need to do is open our hearts a bit. All of us.'

In his recent address to the Asia Australia Institute at the University of New South Wales, the former Prime Minister reiterated his view when he said:

'... the process of reconciliation had to start with an act of recognition. Recognition that it was we non-Aboriginal Australians who did the dispossessing; and yet we had always failed to ask ourselves how we would feel if it had been done to us. When I said these things, it was not my intention to impress guilt upon present generations of Australians for the actions of the past, but rather to acknowledge that we now share a responsibility to put an end to the suffering. I said explicitly that guilt is generally not a useful emotion and, in any case, the recommended treatment is confronting the past, not evading it.'

So if both sides of this apparent debate deny that the allocation of guilt is necessary for the country to deal with the colonial past, then why has it been alleged that Australians have been urged by the black armbands, through a delirium of political correctness, to feel guilty about the past?

The distinction made by John Herron between acknowledgment of the past and guilt about the past is indistinct from the statements by the former Prime Minister that it was not about guilt but about opening our hearts a bit.

The denial of the place of guilt will be at odds with many Indigenous Australians, for whom injustice is not in the remote past but within their living memories. Those who feel keenly the legacy of that past in the present, in the form of loved ones who now suffer the terrible psychological consequences of being removed from their families and being institutionalised, will not readily say that guilt is an altogether irrelevant emotion.

However, as Social Justice Commissioner, Michael Dodson, recently observed, it has not been Aboriginal people talking about guilt in coming to terms with our history, it has been the Prime Minister and Senator Herron who have been most anxious to exorcise the spectre of guilt.

As to the question of guilt, I am myself equivocal. I know very clearly that as individuals, ordinary Australians cannot be expected to feel guilty about the past. Ordinary Australians might fairly be held to account for what happens in their own lifetimes and perhaps, what they leave for the future. It is indeed a useless objective in the teaching and writing of history to hold individuals to account for the past.

However, as a nation, the Australian community has a collective consciousness and conscience that encompasses a responsibility for the present and future, and the past. Our collective consciousness includes the past. For how can we as a contemporary community in 1996 share and celebrate in the achievements of the past, indeed feel responsibility for and express pride in aspects of our past, and not feel responsibility for and express shame in relation to other aspects of the past? To say that ordinary Australians

who are part of the national community today do not have any connection with the shameful aspects of our past, is at odds with our exhortations that they have strong connections to the prideful bits. After all the heroic deeds at Gallipoli and Kokoda are said to be ours as well. Lest we forget.

My feeling is that guilt need not be an ingredient in our national (re)consideration of our history. For those Australians who are not still afflicted with the obscurantist tendencies of the past, who are untroubled about recognising the truths of the past, and are prepared to acknowledge the legacies of that past, guilt is not a feature apparent in their psychology. In my experience, it is for those Australians who resist the truths of history and who yearn for a return to the Great Australian Silence, and who deny some responsibility to deal with the legacy of the past in the present, that guilt seems to be an ingredient. The more vehement the denials the more they betray an anxiety to exorcise guilt.

But if present generations of Australians cannot be held to account for the past, they are surely responsible for the infidelities of the present.

At the present moment the Yorta Yorta people of the Murray River region around Barmah and Shepparton are prosecuting a native title claim in the Federal Court of Australia, in relation to their remnant traditional homelands. William Cooper, an ancestor of the present Yorta Yorta claimants wrote in 1938 to the then Prime Minister, Mr Lyons. He said:

‘I have addressed numerous letters to the editor of the various newspapers and find my pleas for better conditions are, in nine cases out of ten, “pigeon holed”.

‘In spite of this fact we live in the hope that some day the newspapers will begin to publish the truth concerning Aboriginal affairs so that the public, being informed, will see that the great evils from which we are suffering are remedied ...

‘We Aborigines are a “protected” people. I understand that the correct meaning of the word “protector” is “one who protects from injury; one who protects from oppression; a guardian; a regent; one who rules for a sovereign”.

‘It would please us greatly to have a protector over our people who would live up to that standard, but how do our protectorates work? ... Take for instance the policeman who was appointed as a protector of the Aborigines in Central Australia. He went out one day to arrest a native who was reputed to have killed a white man.

‘He stated in his evidence that he shot 17 natives and later shot another 14 and a so-called “Justice of the Peace” officially, without trial, justified the constable for shooting these 31 people. Now ... do you think this Justice of the Peace could justify the Constable before God?

‘Do you think that he could justify his own judgment before the king? ... The whole thing is contrary to British Justice and cannot be justified even before a much lower tribunal, the white people (if they knew the facts) and of these you are one!

‘History records that in the year 1771 white men first landed on the shores of what is now called Botany Bay. They claimed that they had “found” a “new” country – Australia. This country was not new, it was already in possession of, and inhabited by, millions of blacks who, while unarmed excepting spears and boomerangs, nevertheless owned the country as their God-given heritage.

‘From the standpoint of an educated black who can read the Bible upon which British constitution and custom is founded, I marvel at the fact that while the text book of present civilisation, the Bible, states that God gave the Earth to man, the “Christian” interferes with God’s arrangement and stops not even at murder to take that which does not belong to them but belongs to others by right of prior possession and by right of gift from God ...

‘The time is long overdue when the Aborigines should be considered as much and as fully under the protection of the law as any other citizen of the Empire ...

'This more particularly in view of the fact that history records that in the commission originally given to those who came from overseas the strict injunction was given that the Aborigines and their descendants had to be adequately cared for ...

'The taking of rightful belongings has not yet ceased ...

'Will you, by your apathy, tacitly admit that you don't care and thus assume the guilt of your fathers?'

When on 3 June 1992 the High Court of Australia suggested that Mabo might be the foundation of a lasting compromise between the old and new of this continent, I was seized with a conviction in its correctness. But my concern has not just been with the narrow legal meaning of Mabo, though it is critical. I am concerned with the spirit of historical reckoning and acceptance and compromise and reconciliation which it represents. I have hoped that it might be possible for our national leaders to gain an intellectual, if not an emotional or spiritual, understanding of its importance.

Mabo threw the country into social, political and psychological turmoil. I always said that it was the turmoil and confusion the country had to have.

And the challenge for ordinary Australians today is this: that the foundation for compromise – that is the acknowledgment under the common law of England that with the sovereign claim over the Australian continent on behalf the Crown, came the recognition of the native title of the Indigenous inhabitants who became subjects of the Crown entitled to the protections of the law – this compromise comes from their own legal and institutional heritage. Mabo is not a product of Indigenous heritage. Rather more it is the product of the country's English heritage: it is a product of the genius of the common law of England.

If there is one thing about the colonial heritage of Australia that Indigenous Australians might celebrate along with John Howard with the greatest enthusiasm and pride, it must surely be the fact that upon the shoulders of the English settlers or invaders – call them what you will – came the common law of England and with it the civilised institution of native title. What more redemptive prospect can be painted about the country's colonial past? It just confounds me that this golden example of grace in our national inheritance is not the subject of national celebration. After all, Indigenous people are entitled to say: 'it is your law'.

The amendments to the Native Title legislation that are proposed by John Howard's government amount to a derogation and a diminution of the entitlements that Indigenous people have under the common law, which were negotiated in good faith with the Federal Parliament on behalf of the non-Indigenous community, in 1993. Make no mistake, if the amendments as proposed by the Howard Government succeed, Mabo will be no more. There will only be some remnant rights. The spirit of compromise and moral reckoning which Mabo represents will be lost to us and to future generations. It is for our national leaders to rupture the spirit and meaning of Mabo as a key opportunity in our history, and for ordinary Australians to allow this to happen in the coming months; then we will be held to account. Of these obscenities we will indeed be guilty.

William Cooper, whose hopes for justice for his Yorta Yorta people are the subject of Federal Court proceedings under the Native Title legislation, would remind us:

'The taking of rightful belongings has not yet ceased ... Will you, by your apathy tacitly admit that you don't care and thus assume the guilt of your fathers?'

In conclusion, what substance is there in the new emphasis on our colonial history that Prime Minister John Howard and his Minister are urging and in the crusade against the black armbands and their alleged obsession with guilt? The answer is: nothing at all. The Prime Minister has not been able to grasp what his predecessor was able to: that it is not about guilt, it is about opening our hearts a little bit.

And to have an open and generous heart in relation to these things, means that when you acknowledge the wrongs of the past, you might try to do so ungrudgingly. An open heart

means that if a people have suffered wrongs and have wounds that are still keen, then there must be some respect for that. It would be inappropriate for us to say to Jewish people today, 'the treatment of your people has been terrible, but perhaps we should not be so consumed by it, maybe it is time to now look forward'. These are matters for these people to come to terms with. Hectoring by the leading spokesmen for the other side of the colonial grievance, which the Prime Minister represents, about how we need to move on, is stupid. It is ungracious and insensitive and will advance nothing in the relationship. It diminishes one's sincerity.

My concern is that our present national leadership is only thinking in terms of broad characterisations and slogans. A more rigorous examination of the so-called politically correct, black armband, histories would have revealed the fact that no one is urging guilt upon the Australian people.

The new approach is significantly anti-intellectual. The new free speech is tabloid free speech, where people who should expect to account for what they say, are able to conduct so-called debate about issues through tabloid-style slogans that are carefully crafted to activate those hot buttons in our community. Black Armbands. Guilt Industry. Political Correctness. Aboriginal Industry. These are lines that resonate. They work on the evening news grabs. They work on the radio airwaves. So we end up with this brain-damaged dialogue between the politicians and the punters passing for free speech and public debate. The politics of mutual assurance.

I am sure that Robert Hughes, whose seminal book *Culture of Complaint* was touted as the first foray against political correctness but is an intelligent and invigorating critique of anti-intellectualism, would be ashamed to see what is passing for free speech and history in this country today. If John Howard wants to properly comprehend a balanced and perhaps even conservative critique on how we might deal with our history, he might care to read Robert Hughes rather than the opinion polls.

Reproduced with kind permission of Noel Pearson.

Sir William Deane, Governor General of the Commonwealth of Australia

'It is still winter at home'

On the occasion of an ecumenical service for the victims
of the canyoning tragedy
5 August 1999

We are gathered in great sadness to mourn the deaths of the 21 young people who were killed in the canyoning accident near here, last week. They came from five nations – Switzerland, the United Kingdom, South Africa, New Zealand and Australia. Their loss is a profound tragedy for their families and friends who are in the thoughts and the prayers of all of us at this service today. We pray with them for their loved ones who have died. And we also pray that, in the words of our Lord (Matthew Ch.5, v.4), they will truly be comforted.

Fourteen of the victims of the tragedy came from Australia. Collectively, their deaths represent probably the greatest single peacetime loss of young Australians outside our own country. That loss affects not only their families and friends, dreadful though that is. It also deeply affects our nation as a whole and all of its people.

I have, as Governor-General of Australia, with Senator John Herron of our Government, come here on behalf of Australia and of all Australians, to mourn them, to be with and to sympathise with their family members and friends who are here, and to demonstrate how important they were to their homeland. For us, the tragedy is somehow made worse by the fact that they died so far away from the homes, the families, the friends and the land they loved so well.

Australia and Switzerland are on opposite sides of the globe. Yet, in this age of modern telecommunications, one effect of the disaster has been to bring our two countries closer together. On every night since the accident, Switzerland has been in every Australian home that has been tuned into the television news, as well as on the radio, in all our newspapers and other media outlets. Conversely, the fact that two-thirds of those who died came from Australia has given rise to an increased awareness here in Switzerland of my country and its people.

Switzerland has, of course, itself experienced the shock and sorrow of overseas tragedy in the past. Perhaps that has heightened the sympathy and understanding which it has shown in recent days. I have already had the privilege of meeting with you, Madam President, and with Vice-President Ogi and exchanging condolences. I would, on this solemn occasion, like to express to the Swiss authorities and to the people of Switzerland, particularly the people of the Wilderswil and Interlaken regions, our abiding gratitude for all the help and assistance they have provided in the aftermath of the tragedy. In particular, I pay tribute to the bravery of all those who worked in the rescue efforts. We thank them for their skill and dedication. I also particularly mention the competence, the compassion and the kindness of all who have helped to look after the survivors and the relatives who have come here.

The young people – certainly the young Australians – who have been killed all shared the spirit of adventure, the joy of living, the exuberance and the delight of youth. That spirit inspired their lives, and lit the lives of all who knew them, until the end. We remember that and so many other wonderful things about them as we mourn them and grieve for young lives cut so tragically short. And all of us feel and share in their collective loss. For these 21 young men and women were part – a shining part – of our humanity. As John Donne wrote, 'No man is an island'. Anyone's 'death diminishes' us all because we are all 'involved in mankind'.

Yesterday, my wife and I, together with family members and friends of the Australian victims, visited the canyon where the accident occurred. There, in memory of each of the 14 young people who came from our homeland, we cast into the Saxetenbach 14 sprigs of wattle, our

national floral emblem, which we had brought with us from Government House in Canberra. Somehow, we felt that was bringing a little of Australia to them.

It was also, in a symbolic way, helping to bring them home to our country. That is not to suggest that their spirit and their memory will not linger forever, here in Switzerland, at the place where they died. Rather, it is to suggest that a little part of Switzerland has become, and will always be, to some extent, part of Australia. As it will also be part of the other countries outside Switzerland – New Zealand, South Africa and the United Kingdom – from whence they came.

It is still winter at home. But the golden wattles are coming into bloom. Just as these young men and women were in the flower of their youth. And when we are back in Australia we will remember how the flowers and the perfume and the pollen of their and our homeland were carried down the river where they died to Lake Brienz in this beautiful country on the far side of the world.

May they all rest with God.

With kind permission of Sir William Deane.

Doris Lessing
'On not winning the Nobel Prize'

Nobel Lecture
7 December 2007

I am standing in a doorway looking through clouds of blowing dust to where I am told there is still uncut forest. Yesterday I drove through miles of stumps, and charred remains of fires where, in '56, there was the most wonderful forest I have ever seen, all now destroyed. People have to eat. They have to get fuel for fires.

This is north-west Zimbabwe in the early eighties, and I am visiting a friend who was a teacher in a school in London. He is here 'to help Africa', as we put it. He is a gently idealistic soul and what he found in this school shocked him into a depression, from which it was hard to recover. This school is like every other built after Independence. It consists of four large brick rooms side by side, put straight into the dust, one two three four, with a half room at one end, which is the library. In these classrooms are blackboards, but my friend keeps the chalks in his pocket, as otherwise they would be stolen. There is no atlas or globe in the school, no textbooks, no exercise books, or biros. In the library there are no books of the kind the pupils would like to read, but only tomes from American universities, hard even to lift, rejects from white libraries, or novels with titles like *Weekend in Paris* and *Felicity Finds Love*.

There is a goat trying to find sustenance in some aged grass. The headmaster has embezzled the school funds and is suspended, arousing the question familiar to all of us but usually in more august contexts: How is it these people behave like this when they must know everyone is watching them?

My friend doesn't have any money because everyone, pupils and teachers, borrow from him when he is paid and will probably never pay him back. The pupils range from six to twenty-six, because some who did not get schooling as children are here to make it up. Some pupils walk many miles every morning, rain or shine and across rivers. They cannot do homework because there is no electricity in the villages, and you can't study easily by the light of a burning log. The girls have to fetch water and cook before they set off for school and when they get back.

As I sit with my friend in his room, people drop in shyly, and everyone begs for books. 'Please send us books when you get back to London,' one man says. 'They taught us to read but we have no books.' Everybody I met, everyone, begged for books.

I was there some days. The dust blew. The pumps had broken and the women were having to fetch water from the river. Another idealistic teacher from England was rather ill after seeing what this 'school' was like.

On the last day they slaughtered the goat. They cut it into bits and cooked it in a great tin. This was the much anticipated end-of-term feast: boiled goat and porridge. I drove away while it was still going on, back through the charred remains and stumps of the forest.

I do not think many of the pupils of this school will get prizes.

The next day I am to give a talk at a school in North London, a very good school, whose name we all know. It is a school for boys, with beautiful buildings and gardens.

These children here have a visit from some well known person every week, and it is in the nature of things that these may be fathers, relatives, even mothers of the pupils. A visit from a celebrity is not unusual for them.

As I talk to them, the school in the blowing dust of north-west Zimbabwe is in my mind, and I look at the mildly expectant English faces in front of me and try to tell them about what I have seen in the last week. Classrooms without books, without textbooks, or an atlas, or even a map pinned to a wall. A school where the teachers beg to be sent books to tell them how to teach, they being only eighteen or nineteen themselves. I tell these English boys how everybody begs for books: 'Please send us books.' I am sure that anyone who has ever given a speech will know that moment when the faces you are looking at are blank. Your listeners cannot hear what you are saying, there are no images in their minds to match what you are telling them – in this case the story of a school standing in dust clouds, where water is short, and where the end of term treat is a just-killed goat cooked in a great pot.

Is it really so impossible for these privileged students to imagine such bare poverty?

I do my best. They are polite.

I'm sure that some of them will one day win prizes.

Then, the talk is over. Afterwards I ask the teachers how the library is, and if the pupils read. In this privileged school, I hear what I always hear when I go to such schools and even universities.

'You know how it is,' one of the teachers says. 'A lot of the boys have never read at all, and the library is only half used.'

Yes, indeed we do know how it is. All of us.

We are in a fragmenting culture, where our certainties of even a few decades ago are questioned and where it is common for young men and women, who have had years of education, to know nothing of the world, to have read nothing, knowing only some speciality or other, for instance, computers.

What has happened to us is an amazing invention – computers and the internet and TV. It is a revolution. This is not the first revolution the human race has dealt with. The printing revolution, which did not take place in a matter of a few decades, but took much longer, transformed our minds and ways of thinking. A foolhardy lot, we accepted it all, as we always do, never asked, What is going to happen to us now, with this invention of print? In the same way, we never thought to ask, How will our lives, our way of thinking, be changed by this internet, which has seduced a whole generation with its inanities so that even quite reasonable people will confess that once they are hooked, it is hard to cut free, and they may find a whole day has passed in blogging etc.

Very recently, anyone even mildly educated would respect learning, education, and our great store of literature. Of course, we all know that when this happy state was with us, people would pretend to read, would pretend respect for learning. But it is on record that working men and women longed for books, and this is evidenced by the founding of working men's libraries and institutes, the colleges of the 18th and 19th centuries.

Reading, books, used to be part of a general education.

Older people, talking to young ones, must understand just how much of an education reading was, because the young ones know so much less. And if children cannot read, it is because they have not read.

We all know this sad story.

But we do not know the end of it.

We think of the old adage, 'Reading maketh a full man' – and forgetting about jokes to do with over-eating – reading makes a woman and a man full of information, of history, of all kinds of knowledge.

But we in the West are not the only people in the world. Not long ago a friend who had been in Zimbabwe told me about a village where people had not eaten for three days, but they were still talking about books and how to get them, about education.

I belong to an organisation which started out with the intention of getting books into the villages. There was a group of people who in another connection had travelled Zimbabwe at its grass roots. They told me that the villages, unlike what is reported, are full of intelligent people, teachers retired, teachers on leave, children on holidays, old people. I myself paid for a little survey to discover what people in Zimbabwe want to read, and found the results were the same as those of a Swedish survey I had not known about. People want to read the same kinds of books that we in Europe want to read – novels of all kinds, science fiction, poetry, detective stories, plays, and do-it-yourself books, like how to open a bank account. All of Shakespeare too. A problem with finding books for villagers is that they don't know what is available, so a set book, like the *Mayor of Casterbridge*, becomes popular simply because it just happens to be there. *Animal Farm*, for obvious reasons, is the most popular of all novels.

Our organisation was helped from the very start by Norway, and then by Sweden. Without this kind of support our supplies of books would have dried up. We got books from wherever we could. Remember, a good paperback from England costs a month's wages in Zimbabwe: that was *before* Mugabe's reign of terror. Now with inflation, it would cost several years' wages. But having taken a box of books out to a village – and remember there is a terrible shortage of petrol – I can tell you that the box was greeted with tears. The library may be a plank on bricks under a tree. And within a week there will be literacy classes – people who can read teaching those who can't, citizenship classes – and in one remote village, since there were no novels written in the language Tonga, a couple of lads sat down to write novels in Tonga. There are six or so main languages in Zimbabwe and there are novels in all of them: violent, incestuous, full of crime and murder.

It is said that a people gets the government it deserves, but I do not think it is true of Zimbabwe. And we must remember that this respect and hunger for books comes, not from Mugabe's regime, but from the one before it, the whites. It is an astonishing phenomenon, this hunger for books, and it can be seen everywhere from Kenya down to the Cape of Good Hope.

This links improbably with a fact: I was brought up in what was virtually a mud hut, thatched. This kind of house has been built always, everywhere there are reeds or grass, suitable mud, poles for walls. Saxon England for example. The one I was brought up in had four rooms, one beside another, and it was full of books. Not only did my parents take books from England to Africa, but my mother ordered books by post from England for her children. Books arrived in great brown paper parcels, and they were the joy of my young life. A mud hut, but full of books.

Even today I get letters from people living in a village that might not have electricity or running water, just like our family in our elongated mud hut. 'I shall be a writer too,' they say, 'because I've the same kind of house you lived in.'

But here is the difficulty, no?

Writing, writers, do not come out of houses without books.

There is the gap. There is the difficulty.

I have been looking at the speeches by some of your recent prizewinners. Take the magnificent Pamuk. He said his father had 500 books. His talent did not come out of the air, he was connected with the great tradition.

Take V.S. Naipaul. He mentions that the Indian Vedas were close behind the memory of his family. His father encouraged him to write, and when he got to England he would visit the British Library. So he was close to the great tradition.

Let us take John Coetzee. He was not only close to the great tradition, he was the tradition: he taught literature in Cape Town. And how sorry I am that I was never in one of his classes, taught by that wonderfully brave, bold mind.

In order to write, in order to make literature, there must be a close connection with libraries, books, with the Tradition.

I have a friend from Zimbabwe, a Black writer. He taught himself to read from the labels on jam jars, the labels on preserved fruit cans. He was brought up in an area I have driven through, an area for rural blacks. The earth is grit and gravel, there are low sparse bushes. The huts are poor, nothing like the well cared-for huts of the better off. A school – but like one I have described. He found a discarded children's encyclopaedia on a rubbish heap and taught himself from that.

On Independence in 1980 there was a group of good writers in Zimbabwe, truly a nest of singing birds. They were bred in old Southern Rhodesia, under the whites – the mission schools, the better schools. Writers are not made in Zimbabwe. Not easily, not under Mugabe.

All the writers travelled a difficult road to literacy, let alone to becoming writers. I would say learning to read from the printed labels on jam jars and discarded encyclopaedias was not uncommon. And we are talking about people hungering for standards of education beyond them, living in huts with many children – an overworked mother, a fight for food and clothing.

Yet despite these difficulties, writers came into being. And we should also remember that this was Zimbabwe, conquered less than a hundred years before. The grandparents of these people might have been storytellers working in the oral tradition. In one or two generations there was the transition from stories remembered and passed on, to print, to books. What an achievement.

Books, literally wrested from rubbish heaps and the detritus of the white man's world. But a sheaf of paper is one thing, a published book quite another. I have had several accounts sent to me of the publishing scene in Africa. Even in more privileged places like North Africa, with its different tradition, to talk of a publishing scene is a dream of possibilities.

Here I am talking about books never written, writers that could not make it because the publishers are not there. Voices unheard. It is not possible to estimate this great waste of talent, of potential. But even before that stage of a book's creation which demands a publisher, an advance, encouragement, there is something else lacking.

Writers are often asked, How do you write? With a wordprocessor? an electric typewriter? a quill? longhand? But the essential question is, 'Have you found a space, that empty space, which should surround you when you write?' Into that space, which is like a form of listening, of attention, will come the words, the words your characters will speak, ideas – inspiration.

If a writer cannot find this space, then poems and stories may be stillborn.

When writers talk to each other, what they discuss is always to do with this imaginative space, this other time. 'Have you found it? Are you holding it fast?'

Let us now jump to an apparently very different scene. We are in London, one of the big cities. There is a new writer. We cynically enquire, Is she good-looking? If this is a man, charismatic? Handsome? We joke but it is not a joke.

This new find is acclaimed, possibly given a lot of money. The buzzing of paparazzi begins in their poor ears. They are feted, lauded, whisked about the world. Us old ones, who have seen it all, are sorry for this neophyte, who has no idea of what is really happening.

He, she, is flattered, pleased.

But ask in a year's time what he or she is thinking – I've heard them: 'This is the worst thing that could have happened to me,' they say.

Some much publicised new writers haven't written again, or haven't written what they wanted to, meant to.

And we, the old ones, want to whisper into those innocent ears. 'Have you still got your space? Your soul, your own and necessary place where your own voices may speak to you, you alone, where you may dream. Oh, hold onto it, don't let it go.'

My mind is full of splendid memories of Africa which I can revive and look at whenever I want. How about those sunsets, gold and purple and orange, spreading across the sky at evening. How about butterflies and moths and bees on the aromatic bushes of the Kalahari? Or, sitting on the pale grassy banks of the Zambesi, the water dark and glossy, with all the birds of Africa darting about. Yes, elephants, giraffes, lions and the rest, there were plenty of those, but how about the sky at night, still unpolluted, black and wonderful, full of restless stars.

There are other memories too. A young African man, eighteen perhaps, in tears, standing in what he hopes will be his 'library'. A visiting American seeing that his library had no books, had sent a crate of them. The young man had taken each one out, reverently, and wrapped them in plastic. 'But,' we say, 'these books were sent to be read, surely?' 'No,' he replies, 'they will get dirty, and where will I get any more?'

This young man wants us to send him books from England to use as teaching guides.

'I only did four years in senior school,' he says, 'but they never taught me to teach.'

I have seen a teacher in a school where there were no textbooks, not even a chalk for the blackboard. He taught his class of six to eighteen year olds by moving stones in the dust, chanting 'Two times two is ...' and so on. I have seen a girl, perhaps not more than twenty, also lacking textbooks, exercise books, biros, seen her teach the A B C by scratching the letters in the dirt with a stick, while the sun beat down and the dust swirled.

We are witnessing here that great hunger for education in Africa, anywhere in the Third World, or whatever we call parts of the world where parents long to get an education for their children which will take them out of poverty.

I would like you to imagine yourselves somewhere in Southern Africa, standing in an Indian store, in a poor area, in a time of bad drought. There is a line of people, mostly women, with every kind of container for water. This store gets a bowser of precious water every afternoon from the town, and here the people wait.

The Indian is standing with the heels of his hands pressed down on the counter, and he is watching a black woman, who is bending over a wadge of paper that looks as if it has been torn from a book. She is reading *Anna Karenin*.

She is reading slowly, mouthing the words. It looks a difficult book. This is a young woman with two little children clutching at her legs. She is pregnant. The Indian is distressed, because the young woman's headscarf, which should be white, is yellow with dust. Dust lies between her breasts and on her arms. This man is distressed because of the lines of people, all thirsty. He doesn't have enough water for them. He is angry because he knows there are people dying out there, beyond the dust clouds. His older brother had been here holding the fort, but he had said he needed a break, had gone into town, really rather ill, because of the drought.

This man is curious. He says to the young woman, 'What are you reading?'

'It is about Russia,' says the girl.

'Do you know where Russia is?' He hardly knows himself.

The young woman looks straight at him, full of dignity, though her eyes are red from dust, 'I was best in the class. My teacher said I was best.'

The young woman resumes her reading. She wants to get to the end of the paragraph.

The Indian looks at the two little children and reaches for some Fanta, but the mother says, 'Fanta makes them thirstier'.

The Indian knows he shouldn't do this but he reaches down to a great plastic container beside him, behind the counter, and pours out two mugs of water, which he hands to the children. He watches while the girl looks at her children drinking, her mouth moving. He gives her a mug of water. It hurts him to see her drinking it, so painfully thirsty is she.

Now she hands him her own plastic water container, which he fills. The young woman and the children watch him closely so that he doesn't spill any.

She is bending again over the book. She reads slowly. The paragraph fascinates her and she reads it again.

'Varenka, with her white kerchief over her black hair, surrounded by the children and gaily and good-humouredly busy with them, and at the same visibly excited at the possibility of an offer of marriage from a man she cared for, looked very attractive. Koznyshev walked by her side and kept casting admiring glances at her. Looking at her, he recalled all the delightful things he had heard from her lips, all the good he knew about her, and became more and more conscious that the feeling he had for her was something rare, something he had felt but once before, long, long ago, in his early youth. The joy of being near her increased step by step, and at last reached such a point that, as he put a huge birch mushroom with a slender stalk and up-curling top into her basket, he looked into her eyes and, noting the flush of glad and frightened agitation that suffused her face, he was confused himself, and in silence gave her a smile that said too much.'

This lump of print is lying on the counter, together with some old copies of magazines, some pages of newspapers with pictures of girls in bikinis.

It is time for the woman to leave the haven of the Indian store, and set off back along the four miles to her village. Outside, the lines of waiting women clamour and complain. But still the Indian lingers. He knows what it will cost this girl – going back home, with the two clinging children. He would give her the piece of prose that so fascinates her, but he cannot really believe this splinter of a girl with her great belly can really understand it.

Why is perhaps a third of *Anna Karenin* here on this counter in a remote Indian store? It is like this.

A certain high official, from the United Nations as it happens, bought a copy of this novel in a bookshop before he set out on his journey to cross several oceans and seas. On the plane, settled in his business class seat, he tore the book into three parts. He looked around his fellow passengers as he did this, knowing he would see looks of shock, curiosity, but some of amusement. When he was settled, his seat belt tight, he said aloud to whomever could hear, 'I always do this when I've a long trip. You don't want to have to hold up some heavy great book.' The novel was a paperback, but, true, it is a long book. This man is well used to people listening when he spoke. 'I always do this, travelling,' he confided. 'Travelling at all these days, is hard enough.' And as soon as people were settling down, he opened his part of *Anna Karenin*, and read. When people looked his way, curiously or not, he confided in them. 'No, it really is the only way to travel.' He knew the novel, liked it, and this original mode of reading did add spice to what was after all a well known book.

When he reached the end of a section of the book, he called the air hostess, and sent the chapters back to his secretary, travelling in the cheaper seats. This caused much interest, condemnation, certainly curiosity, every time a section of the great Russian novel arrived, mutilated but readable, in the back part of the plane. Altogether, this clever way of reading *Anna Karenin* makes an impression, and probably no one there would forget it.

Meanwhile, in the Indian store, the young woman is holding on to the counter, her little children clinging to her skirts. She wears jeans, since she is a modern woman, but over

them she has put on the heavy woollen skirt, part of the traditional dress of her people: her children can easily cling onto its thick folds.

She sends a thankful look to the Indian, whom she knew liked her and was sorry for her, and she steps out into the blowing clouds.

The children are past crying, and their throats are full of dust.

This was hard, oh yes, it was hard, this stepping, one foot after another, through the dust that lay in soft deceiving mounds under her feet. Hard, but she was used to hardship, was she not? Her mind was on the story she had been reading. She was thinking, She is just like me, in her white headscarf, and she is looking after children, too. I could be her, that Russian girl. And the man there, he loves her and will ask her to marry him. She had not finished more than that one paragraph. Yes, she thinks, a man will come for me, and take me away from all this, take me and the children, yes, he will love me and look after me.

She steps on. The can of water is heavy on her shoulders. On she goes. The children can hear the water slopping about. Half way she stops, sets down the can.

Her children are whimpering and touching it. She thinks that she cannot open it, because dust would blow in. There is no way she can open the can until she gets home.

'Wait,' she tells her children, 'wait.'

She has to pull herself together and go on.

She thinks, My teacher said there is a library, bigger than the supermarket, a big building and it is full of books. The young woman is smiling as she moves on, the dust blowing in her face. I am clever, she thinks. Teacher said I am clever. The cleverest in the school – she said I was. My children will be clever, like me. I will take them to the library, the place full of books, and they will go to school, and they will be teachers – my teacher told me I could be a teacher. My children will live far from here, earning money. They will live near the big library and enjoy a good life.

You may ask how that piece of the Russian novel ever ended up on that counter in the Indian store?

It would make a pretty story. Perhaps someone will tell it.

On goes that poor girl, held upright by thoughts of the water she will give her children once home, and drink a little of herself. On she goes, through the dreaded dusts of an African drought.

We are a jaded lot, we in our threatened world. We are good for irony and even cynicism. Some words and ideas we hardly use, so worn out have they become. But we may want to restore some words that have lost their potency.

We have a treasure-house of literature, going back to the Egyptians, the Greeks, the Romans. It is all there, this wealth of literature, to be discovered again and again by whoever is lucky enough to come upon it. A treasure. Suppose it did not exist. How impoverished, how empty we would be.

We own a legacy of languages, poems, histories, and it is not one that will ever be exhausted. It is there, always.

We have a bequest of stories, tales from the old storytellers, some of whose names we know, but some not. The storytellers go back and back, to a clearing in the forest where a great fire burns, and the old shamans dance and sing, for our heritage of stories began in fire, magic, the spirit world. And that is where it is held, today.

Ask any modern storyteller and they will say there is always a moment when they are touched with fire, with what we like to call inspiration, and this goes back and back to the beginning of our race, to the great winds that shaped us and our world.

The storyteller is deep inside every one of us. The story-maker is always with us. Let us suppose our world is ravaged by war, by the horrors that we all of us easily imagine. Let us suppose floods wash through our cities, the seas rise. But the storyteller will be there, for it is our imaginations which shape us, keep us, create us – for good and for ill. It is our stories that will recreate us, when we are torn, hurt, even destroyed. It is the storyteller, the dream-maker, the myth-maker, that is our phoenix, that represents us at our best, and at our most creative.

That poor girl trudging through the dust, dreaming of an education for her children, do we think that we are better than she is – we, stuffed full of food, our cupboards full of clothes, stifling in our superfluities?

I think it is that girl, and the women who were talking about books and an education when they had not eaten for three days, that may yet define us.

Geraldine Brooks

'A Home in Fiction'

Boyer Lectures 2011: 'The Idea of Home', Lecture 4
Broadcast 11 December 2011

A few years ago, on a crisp autumn day in Cambridge Massachusetts, I attended a lecture entitled 'Singularities in Algebraic Plane Curves'. For reasons that I will not go into, it was necessary that I attend. I slumped into the room, armed with a doodle pad. My plan was to sit politely and let the talk sail over my head. I would use the hour for meditative reverie; perhaps, if I positioned myself wisely, a discreet little nap might be possible.

On the pad I carried that day, I have a few fragments of the sentences the mathematician used:

*A formal power series about the origin is an infinite sum
Homomorphism is an isomorphism if and only if the matrix is inevitable*

This is like poetry, I thought, and I leaned forward to hear more. The mathematician was eloquent. She was passionate. And when I set aside my firm belief that I could not comprehend her, something strange happened. It wasn't that I understood her work, but I understood her vision. I realised I had lived, until that moment, in an airlock, and that she was prising open the heavy door, just a crack. In the sudden brief shaft of light, I glimpsed a sliver of the world beyond, the world in which she lived. When she looked at the old maple beyond the lecture room window, at the great swoop of bough arcing out from massive trunk, her consciousness overlaid a pattern on that branch that was elegant and sensual. I could imagine, for a moment, what it was to see with her eyes, to feel with her heart, to inhabit a space in which the language was not particular and national, but infinite and universal, a world in which every object sang to her with its own particular music, chiming out in delicate arpeggios and thundering chords.

I know now that it is a beautiful world, but I also know that I can't live there. If she has lungs, I have gills. I swim in a sea of words. They flow around me and through me and, by a process that is not fully clear to me, some delicate hidden membrane draws forth the stuff that is the necessary condition of my life. I *am* sure though that our work, the mathematician's and mine, is essentially the same. In her exploration of the singularity in every plane curve, she seeks a way to more perfectly describe that arcing branch, or a soaring bridge, the squiggle in the iron lace of a terrace house, the quivering S bend of a squirrel's upraised tail. She pushes her way deeper and deeper into the full truth of the world. This, also, is what I must do.

It is my great good luck that the words I use are English words, which means I live in a very old nation of open borders; a rich, deep, multi-layered, promiscuous universe, infused with Latin, German, French, Greek, Arabic and countless other tongues. I would not be able to swim so far, dive so deep, in a linguistically isolated language such as Hungarian, or even a protectively elitist one such as French. When I write a word in English, a simple one, such as, say, *chief*, I have unwittingly ushered a querulous horde into the room. The Roman legionary is there, shaking his *cap*, or head, and Al Cap is there, slouching in his signature working man's headgear. The toque-wearing cook is there, too, reminding me that English had *chef*, from the French (who had changed the Romans' *k* sound to *sh*, and the *p* sound to *eff*) before it had *captain*, from the Latin, which is why the word chief now sounds more like the younger word than its elder. So is the English root of *chief* properly described as French, from which English first borrowed it, or Latin, from which it originated? I don't know what a linguistics expert or a lexicographer would say. But as a novelist I am glad to have this immense cast of captains and chefs standing behind my chief, telling me that whoever she

is in my novel, she trails a vast raft of history and association behind her, subtly framing her in my readers' minds before I have let her utter a single word.

Henry David Thoreau wrote that 'The youth gets together his materials to build a bridge to the moon, or perchance a palace or a temple on the earth, and at length the middle-aged man concludes to build a wood-shed with them.'

Well, it did not go that way for me. I started out hoping for the woodshed – a nice tight serviceable structure that would serve a modestly useful purpose. I would be a newspaper reporter in the city of my birth. I would try to write stories that helped people; perhaps, every so often, an article might right a local wrong or even shift policy a few degrees in a more progressive direction. But generally my stories would be useful simply by offering an informative, entertaining read. Then they'd end up lining the floor of the budgie cage.

In my twenties, unexpected doors opened for me, and my ambition enlarged a bit. I started thinking that building a temple might not be out of the question. As a foreign correspondent bearing witness in the dark and troubled places of the earth, I began to entertain a hope that my words might have an impact on the councils of the powerful. I hoped they would be a true and valuable reflection of the history unfolding before my eyes – that 'first rough draft' that historians and analysts would turn to as they shaped a better understanding of our times.

Now, as a fiction writer, my ambition has slipped all reasonable bounds. Now, in middle age, I aspire to build that bridge to the moon. Like the mathematician, I am after nothing less than eternal truths: what is this world, how can we more perfectly describe it? Who are we, who have we been?

Of course, it is one thing to have the ambition, another thing to have the means. But I know I have to do the best I can with the materials I have to hand; materials that I started assembling from the time I became literate, and have continued to amass throughout my career in journalism and on into fiction. By now, the toolbox has grown quite heavy, and some of the first acquired implements continue to be the most useful of my craft.

At Sydney University, I studied government and fine arts. A freshly minted BA (hons), I came to the newsroom of the *Sydney Morning Herald* tremendously well informed about the merits of fresco over tempera in Quattrocento painting and classical political theory from Plato to Hobbes.

So they sent me to the sports department to cover the races.

Actually, that's putting it grandly. I didn't actually get to 'cover' the races, if that conveys writing delightful Runyonesque colour pieces about characters at the track. My job was to amass and record the 'details' – the plethora of facts on which the senior reporters relied for their reporting. I had to take note of how the odds fluctuated in the run-up to the start, note the condition of the track, record where each horse was at each turn and at the finish, the weights and the handicaps and reams of other data that I do not now remember. I had to do it at speed, for each horse in each race at every race meeting. Who would have thought the old town had so many race meetings in her? On Saturday night, having covered the trots the night before and the gallops during the day, I made my way to the greyhound track and did a different set of details for that last redoubt of the desperate punter, the dogs. Then I had to return to the old *Herald* building on Broadway and check the first edition of the paper 'on the stone' before the presses rolled for the early edition. This was the most nerve-racking moment of a very long week, for two reasons. One was a matter of union demarcation. As a member of the journalists' union, I was not to handle anything that pertained to the work of the printers' union members. If I inadvertently touched a piece of hot type, the father of the chapel might call a stop work. The second reason was that if I failed to see a misprint, country bookmakers who paid out on the results in the *Herald* first edition might lose money, and they would be ... unhappy. In consequence, I would lose my job. At the very least.

As much as I disliked that work, I acquired some useful and durable tools from it. Above all, I learned a respect for factual details which is essential to fiction. That might seem odd;

why should a novelist need facts? Isn't fiction fact's antonym? In this, I am advised by Leclerc de Buffon, a distinguished 18th century naturalist. 'Let us gather facts,' he said, 'in order to have ideas.' For me, facts are first inspiration, the idea or set of ideas from which my imaginative edifice will grow. They are also the indispensable formwork into which imagination can be poured. Sometimes, the texture of the forms will still be there, in the finished text, part of the aesthetic of the work, meant to be seen. I will do it this way to give the work a sense of authenticity, to ensnare my readers and convince them of the truth of the world I have imagined. But most of it will be taken down and carried away, because the imagined thing will have fully occupied the factual spaces and become strong enough to stand alone. Always, the better the formwork, the better and more complete the factual basis of my novel, the more daring the design of the fiction can be. But the fiction must dictate the design. The story must tell me what it is I need to know. So I do my research as I write, and when I come to a place where I need to know something, only then do I go looking for it.

I enjoy running down these facts. It's a bit like a quest, sometimes, or a vast puzzle. How can I find out exactly what books a rural English minister in the mid 17th century would have had in the rectory library? What word would a mid-17th century midwife have used for fetus? What did Thoreau do when he wasn't contemplating the wilderness or spending the night in jail to protest slavery? In the case of the rectory library, I happened upon an academic who had just written a paper on that very topic. For the right mid-17th century word, I consulted the *Oxford Historical Thesaurus of the English Language* to find that the word she would have used for fetus was 'shapling'. And I was amused and astonished to find out that the great New England wilderness sage earned his bread in the family pencil making business, and had used much of his time at Harvard to glean the secrets of variable-hardness pencils.

So the tools acquired by the racing details cadet all those years ago at the *Herald* get a good workout these days, as do many other tools picked up here and there in my career as a journalist. I was a news reporter for 16 years, seven of them a foreign correspondent in the Mideast, Africa and the Balkans. Perhaps the most useful equipment I acquired in that time is a lack of preciousness about the act of writing. A reporter must write. There must be a story. The *mot juste* unarriving? Tell that to your desk. Your editor will not wait for you to get your aura on straight. File, or fail. As a result of that discipline, I no more believe in writer's block than in panel beater's block or hairdresser's block. Writing may aspire to art, but it begins as craft. Words are stones, and the book is a wall. You choose each stone with consideration, you place it with effort. Sometimes, you find just the right stone – the right shape and heft – for that difficult niche, and the effect is beautiful and satisfying. Your wall has gone up straight and true. Other days, you pick up one stone and then another, and none of them is right. You try it, it will not fit. Frustrated, you jam it in anyhow. The effect is unsightly, the balance precarious. You come back the next day and you cannot bear to look at it. You bring in the backhoe and knock it over.

The important thing is the effort. There can be no day without lifting stones. And after enough days, if you have sweated enough, scraped enough skin off your hands, been patient and diligent with your craft, unsparing in use of the backhoe, you will, in the end, have a wall. And it may even be a beautiful wall that will last for a hundred years.

I learned to write fiction in stages. From daily newspaper reporting, I wrote a reporter's book. *Nine Parts of Desire* was a journalist's attempt to stand back from what I had learned in six years living among the women of Islam, to take all the shards of experience written up in haste, the stories walked away from under deadline pressure, and go back, with time to reinvestigate and consider. I had a one year leave of absence from my reporting job, and I wasted the first six months of that leave trying to figure out how to write something longer than a three thousand word news feature. For weeks, months, the stones lay scattered, resisting all attempts to gather them into a serviceable wall. By trial and error, I eventually came up with a narrative strong enough to bind together disparate experiences gathered over many years in several different countries.

My second book, *Foreign Correspondence*, was much more quirky and personal. It began as a memoir cum travel adventure about my childhood penfriends and my adult quest to find them. But because it was written in the shadow of my father's death, it became a different book. As I wrote it, I learned that my real quest would be to make sense of my father, and of my relationship to that difficult, damaged, beloved man.

I can pinpoint the day I became a novelist; I can recall the moment with perfect clarity. But at the time, I did not know it had happened. It took me ten years to find out. It was a rare, beautiful English summer day and I was taking a brief break from reporting in the Middle East. As a respite from the hot and dusty places of my beat, my husband Tony and I were rambling in England's Peak District. We came across a finger post pointing to Eyam, and underneath it said 'Plague Village'. Intrigued, we went there, and in the parish church was a small exhibit that gave an account of how Bubonic Plague had struck the town in 1665 and the villagers, alone among all other infected communities, had elected to quarantine themselves and prevent the spread of the disease into the surrounding population. The account described how at the height of the plague, the surviving villagers had closed the church and met for services in a field, where the worshippers could stand apart from each other. We went to that field, and in the play of the light through the leaves, I could see them: standing alone, worshipping together, somehow still willing to talk to a God who had asked so much of them and yet offered no respite. The pale faces lifted towards the weak English sunlight were haggard, weary, grief-racked. Yet hopeful, because they yet lived, and so many others had died.

I did not speed home that day and call the *Wall Street Journal* to tender my notice, run up to my garret and start writing a novel. I went back to my work, covering modern catastrophes. But all the time, the story of that ancient time of crisis was on my mind. I would use the conduct of the people I was covering as a template to imagine it: Did the villagers of Eyam act like this? Did crisis bring out their best self, or their worst? Did one of them answer disaster with the kindness of that Kurdish man, the grace of that Eritrean girl? Did another become as vicious and morally lost as this Baathist torturer, that Somali boy-soldier?

The questions nagged at me until I started hearing voices. Or one voice, at least: the voice suggested in half a line from one of the Eyam minister's few surviving letters, written just after his wife has died of plague. In it, he mentions that his maid has survived and is attending to his needs. That brief mention was all there was of that maid in the historical record; there was nothing more of her to be found, not even a name. Yet her voice was very clear to me. And how she sounded told me who she was. Who she was told me how she would act, and that, in turn, set the plot of the novel in motion.

Something similar has happened in all my novels. Someone rises up out of the grave and begins to talk to me. Until they do, I do not have a book. Often, the voices that speak to me are the voices of the unheard. The maid who was illiterate and who did not get to set down how she felt about caring for that minister, how she grieved for his wife. The enslaved woman on a Virginia plantation, when teaching slaves to read was against the law. Puritan minister's daughter who *has* been taught to read, because it is good for her to study her Bible, but not to write, for women are not thought to need a tool to communicate outside the boundaries of the family. Which is one reason there are no female diaries from colonial America before 1700, and no good ones until 1750.

So where do you go to hear their voices, to imagine how they might have expressed themselves, what issues might have occupied their minds? Well, sadly, you go to court. You will find her there, in every era. Accused of being a witch, because she was poor and alone, or a scold, which meant she had been overheard criticising a man in public. And if the English assizes or the Massachusetts Bay Colony's religious tribunals took down verbatim transcripts, you will be able to read what she had to say. And you will recognise her – her anger, her sense of injustice, her awareness that she, as a woman, is getting a crook deal.

Some critics have complained that my narrator's voices are too modern, too feminist. I urge them to go read some court transcripts.

If one definition of home is a destination, then I have reached it at last, as a fiction writer who draws inspiration from the past and nourishes it with experience garnered as a foreign correspondent. I do not think I would be able to write the books if I had not had, as prelude, those years of covering catastrophe. A foreign correspondent enters people's lives at the worst of times and mines them for the most terrible details. You write the story, hoping someone who matters will read it and give a damn. And then you try to forget about it so that you can go and do it all again; some other war, some other person's desperate sadness. You try to clear the cache. But you can't. You can't drag and drop your memories into the void.

*What is the price of experience, asks the poet William Blake. Do men buy it for a song?
Or wisdom for a dance in the street? No, it is bought with the price
Of all that a man hath, his house, his wife, his children.
Wisdom is sold in the desolate market where none come to buy,
And in the wither'd field where the farmer plows for bread in vain.*

So, I try to use the experiences that I have had, to make the suffering I witnessed count for something. I believe fiction matters. I know it has power. I know this because the jailers and the despots are always so afraid of it. In Israel, I interviewed, and later befriended, a 15-year-old Palestinian after he stoned my car on the road to Hebron. Not long after, his militancy landed him a five year sentence in an Israeli jail. Because he had told me he loved English books, I tried to bring him a copy of Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*, thinking the story and the spare language would be accessible to him. The jailers would not allow it. I thought of that boy when Major Michael Mori, the US Marine attorney for David Hicks, recounted how he had been barred from giving Hicks a copy of *To Kill A Mocking Bird*. He also noted that in the few letters Hicks was allowed to receive, the word 'love' had been redacted. These stories enrage me, but they also get me up in the morning. I am glad the jailers fear the power of fiction, the power of words. It encourages me to try harder, to give them something new to worry about.

The contours of my work life are very different these days from that of the young woman whose bag was always open in the cupboard, ready to receive items from a packing list that included both a chador and a bullet-proof vest. These days, my work day begins with a short walk up a dirt track from my house to the main road, where I wait with my younger son for a yellow school bus to come to a halt in a strobe of flashing lights. It is odd that in this country that so deplores any hint of the nanny state, this most nanny-ish and levelling institution is ubiquitous and embraced. My son climbs aboard, the stop sign folds back, and I wave. By the time I reach the house, I am already at work. I pause in the kitchen to brew a fresh cup of coffee, and as I wait, I pull a poetry anthology off the shelf and let the book fall open. I read whatever poem my eye falls on and, pump primed, climb the stairs to my study and step back into the past.

In his 1936 classic for children, *A Little History of the World*, the Austrian author Ernst Hans Gombrich describes the business of writing about the past. It is, he says, like lighting a scrap of paper and dropping it into a bottomless well. As it falls and burns, it lights up the sides of the well in the same way that our memories light up the past. The deeper it falls, the less is illuminated. Living memory gives way to archives, archives to cave paintings, cave paintings to fossils, until the light goes out and everything is dark. But, as Gombrich writes, even in that dark silence, we have not yet reached the beginning of the human story. Behind every beginning, no matter how long ago, there is another beginning. Every generation has its Once Upon a Time. Your grandmother, her grandmother, your grandmother's grandmother's grandmother ... and already we are back several hundred years. And every one of them probably telling stories that started with some version of Once Upon a Time.

I don't know why I am, as a novelist, so attracted to the stories of the past. It might be a case of symbiosis. Because I was an Australian of a particular time and place, I yearned to know

the world, to travel and adventure abroad. In my travels, I met a man who never wished to leave his own shore, who would have dwelt contently in the archives that can be found in the Boston–Washington–New York corridor. That man loves history. Because of me, he travels the world. Because of him, I travel the past. Moral, if any: it's fun to sleep with foreigners, but be warned – this can change your life.

And now, as I make my home in literature, in a particular genre of fiction that explores the places in the deep well that the burning paper has left unilluminated, I think of that mathematician, and her search for a more perfect description of the world's swoops and curves. What can I know, after all, that is true about these people who lived and died so long ago, lived and died, as Henry James asserts, with a consciousness different from ours, a consciousness formed when more than half the things that make our world did not yet exist for them?

But I believe that consciousness isn't shaped by things. You can move the furniture about as much as you like; the emotions of the people in the room will not change. Consciousness is shaped by fear and joy, hatred and tenderness. This is what I know: they loved, as I love. And that is as good a starting point as any.

© Geraldine Brooks.