English
Stage 6

Speeches
HSC English (Advanced)
Module B: Critical Study of Texts
Nonfiction, Media or Multimedia

Support Document

1999
Acknowledgements

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Vaclav Havel, New Year’s Address to the Nation, Prague, 1 January 1990.


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Introduction


Module B: Critical Study of Texts

This module requires students to explore and evaluate a specific text and its reception in a range of contexts. It develops students’ understanding of questions of textual integrity. (Reread English Stage 6 Syllabus, p 52.) Students choose one text from one of the listed types of text.

Nonfiction, Media or Multimedia — Speeches

Students who choose to study the speeches explore the ways ideas are articulated in the prescribed texts. They explore the distinctive qualities of each of the speeches and the ways different audiences shape meaning. Students reflect on the values implied in different responses and in rhetoric itself.

The speeches selected for study are the following:

Socrates, 'No evil can happen', 399 BC
Marcus Tullius Cicero, 'Among us you can dwell no longer', 63 BC
Abraham Lincoln, 'Government of the people, by the people, for the people', 1863
Emma Goldman, The political criminal of today must needs be the saint of the new age', 1917
Martin Luther King, 'I have a dream', 1963
Denise Levertov, Statement for a Television Program, 1972
Margaret Atwood, 'Spotty-Handed Villainesses', 1994
Vaclav Havel, 'A Contaminated Moral Environment', 1990
Paul Keating, Funeral Service of the Unknown Australian Soldier, 1993
Noel Pearson, 'An Australian history for us all', 1996
Aung San Suu Kyi, Keynote Address at the Beijing World Conference on Women, 1995
Mary McAleese, The Defence of Freedom, 1998
Socrates

‘No evil can happen’

399 BC

(from Plato, The Apology)

Thou doest wrong to think that a man of any use at all is to weigh the risk of life or death, and not to consider one thing only, whether when he acts he does the right thing or the wrong, performs the deeds of a good man or a bad...

If I should be found to be wiser than the multitude, it would be in this, that having no adequate knowledge of the Beyond, I do not presume that I have it. But one thing I do know, and that is that to do injustice or turn my back on the better is alike an evil and a disgrace. And never shall I fear a possible good, rather than avoid a certain evil . . . If you say to me, ‘Socrates, Anytus fails to convince us, we let you go on condition that you no longer spend your life in this search, and that you give up philosophy, but if you are caught at it again you must die’ — my reply is ‘Men of Athens, I honour and love you, but I shall obey God rather than you, and while I breathe, and have the strength, I shall never turn from philosophy, nor from warning and admonishing any of you I come across not to disgrace your citizenship of a great city renowned for its wisdom and strength, by giving your thought to reaping the largest possible harvest of wealth and honour and glory, and giving neither thought nor care that you may reach the best in judgement, truth, and the soul...’

So God bids, and I consider that never has a greater good been done you, than through my ministry in the city. For it is my one business to go about to persuade young and old alike not to make their bodies and their riches their first and their engrossing care, but rather to give it to the perfecting of their soul. Virtue springs not from possessions, but from virtue springs possessions and all other human blessings, whether for the individual or for society. If that is to corrupt the youth, then it is mischievous. But that and nothing else is my offending, and he lies who says else. Further I would say, O Athenians, you can believe Anytus or not, you may acquit or not, but I shall not alter my conduct, no, not if I have to die a score of deaths.

Uproar ensued on these words in court, but Socrates appealed for a hearing, and went on.

You can assure yourselves of this that, being what I say, if you put me to death, you will not be doing greater injury to me than to yourselves.

To do me wrong is beyond the power of a Meletus or an Anytus. Heaven permits not the better man to be wronged by the worse. Death, exile, disgrace — Anytus and the average man may count these great evils, not I. A far greater evil is to do as he is now doing, trying to do away with a fellow-being unjustly.

O Athenians, I am far from pleading, as one might expect, for myself; it is for you I plead lest you should err as concerning the gift of God given unto you, by condemning me. If you put me to death you will not easily find another of my sort, who, to use a metaphor that may cause some laughter, am attached by God to the state, as a kind of gadfly to a big generous horse, rather slow because of its very bigness and in need of being waked up. As such and to that end God has attached me to the city, and all day long and everywhere I fasten on you, rousing and persuading and admonishing you...
Be not angry with me speaking the truth, for no man will escape alive who honourably and sincerely opposes you or any other mob, and puts his foot down before the many unjust and unrighteous things that would otherwise happen in the city. The man who really fights for justice and right, even if he expects but a short career, untouched, must occupy a private not a public station…

Clearly, if I tried to persuade you and overcame you by entreaty, when you have taken the oath of judge, I should be teaching you not to believe that there are gods, and my very defence would be a conviction that I do not pay them regard. But that is far from being so. I believe in them as no one of my accusers believes. And to you I commit my cause and to God, to judge me as seemeth best for me and for you.

Then the result is declared amid a strained hush — ‘Guilty’. Socrates again stands forth to speak.

Men of Athens, many things keep me from being grieved that you have convicted me. What has happened was not unexpected by me. I am rather surprised at the number of votes on either side. I did not think the majority would be so little. As it is the transference of thirty votes would have acquitted me…

A fine life it would be for one at my age always being driven out from one city and changing to another. For I know that whithersoever I go the young men will listen to my words, just as here. If I drive them away, they themselves will have me cast out, and if I don't drive them away their fathers and relatives will cast me out for their sakes.

Again there is an anxious interval while the jurors decide between the penalties. When the decision is announced, the word is ‘Death’.

O men, hard it is not to avoid death, it is far harder to avoid wrongdoing. It runs faster than death. I being slow and stricken in years am caught by the slower, but my accusers, sharp and clever as they are, by the swifter wickedness. And now I go to pay the debt of death at your hands, but they to pay the debt of crime and unrighteousness at the hand of Truth. I for my part shall abide by the award; let them see to it also. Perhaps somehow these things were to be, and I think it is well…

Wherefore, O Judges, be of good cheer about death, and know of a certainty that no evil can happen to a good man, either in life or after death. He and his are not neglected by the gods, nor has my own approaching end happened by mere chance. But I see clearly that to die and be released was better for me; and therefore the oracle gave no sign. For which reason, also, I am not angry with my condemners, or with my accusers; they have done me no harm, although they did not mean to do me any good; and for this I may gently blame them.

Still I have a favour to ask of them. When my sons are grown up, I would ask you, O my friends, to punish them, and I would have you trouble them, as I have troubled you, if they seem to care about riches, or anything, more than about virtue; or if they pretend to be something when they are really nothing, then reprove them, as I have reproved you, for not caring about that for which they ought to care, and thinking that they are something when they are really nothing. And if you do this, I and my sons will have received justice at your hands.

The hour of departure has arrived, and we go our ways — I to die, and you to live. Which is better God only knows.
1. When, O Catiline, do you mean to cease abusing our patience? How long is that madness of yours still to mock us? When is there to be an end of that unbridled audacity of yours, swaggering about as it does now? Do not the nightly guards placed on the Palatine Hill; do not the watches posted throughout the city; does not the alarm of the people, and the union of all good men; does not the precaution taken of assembling the senate in this most defensible place; do not the looks and countenances of this venerable body here present, have any effect upon you? Do you not feel that your plans are detected? Do you not see that your conspiracy is already arrested and rendered powerless by the knowledge which every one here possesses of it? What is there that you did last night, what the night before; where is it that you were; who was there that you summoned to meet you; what design was there which was adopted by you, with which you think that any one of us is unacquainted?

Shame on the age and on its principles! The senate is aware of these things; the consul sees them; and yet this man lives. Lives! aye, he comes even into the senate. He takes a part in the public deliberations; he is watching and marking down and checking off for slaughter every individual among us. And we, gallant men that we are, think that we are doing our duty to the republic if we keep out of the way of his frenzied attacks.

You ought, O Catiline, long ago to have been led to execution by command of the consul. That destruction which you have been long plotting against us ought to have already fallen on your own head.

What? Did not that most illustrious man, Publius Scipio, the Pontifex Maximus, in his capacity of a private citizen, put to death Tiberius Gracchus, though but slightly undermining the constitution? And shall we, who are the consuls, tolerate Catiline, openly desirous to destroy the whole world with fire and slaughter? For I pass over older instances, such as how Gaius Servilius Ahala with his own hand slew Spurius Maelius when plotting a revolution in the state. There was, there was once such virtue in this republic, that brave men would repress mischievous citizens with severer chastisement than the most bitter enemy. For we have a resolution of the senate, a formidable and authoritative decree against you, O Catiline; the wisdom of the republic is not at fault, nor the dignity of this senatorial body. We, we alone — I say it openly — we, the consuls, are wanting in our duty.

2. The senate once passed a decree that Lucius Opimius, the consul, should take care that the republic suffered no injury. Not one night elapsed. There was put to death, on some mere suspicion of disaffection, Gaius Gracchus, a man whose family had borne the most unblemished reputation for many generations. There was slain Marcus Fulvius, a man of consular rank, and all his children. By a like decree of the senate the safety of the republic was entrusted to Gaius Marius and Lucius Valerius, the consuls. Did not the vengeance of the republic, did not execution overtake Lucius Saturninus, a tribune of the people, and Gaius Servilius, the praetor, without the delay of one single day? But we, for these twenty days, have been allowing the edge of the senate's authority to grow blunt, as it were. For we are in possession of a similar decree of the senate, but we keep it locked up in its parchment; buried, I may say, in the sheath; and
according to this decree you ought, O Catiline, to be put to death this instant. You live — and you live, not to lay aside, but to persist in your audacity.

I wish, O conscript fathers, to be merciful; I wish not to appear negligent amid such danger to the state; but I do now accuse myself of remissness and culpable inactivity. A camp is pitched in Italy, at the entrance of Etruria, in hostility to the republic; the number of the enemy increases every day, and yet the general of that camp, the leader of those enemies, we see within the walls — ay, and even in the senate — planning every day some internal injury to the republic. If, O Catiline, I should now order you to be arrested, to be put to death, I should, I suppose, have to fear lest all good men should say that I had acted tardily, rather than that any one should affirm that I acted cruelly. But yet this, which ought to have been done long since, I have good reason for not doing as yet; I will put you to death, then, when there shall be not one person possible to be found so wicked, so abandoned, so like yourself, as not to allow that it has been rightly done. As long as one person exists who can dare to defend you, you shall live; but you shall live as you do now, surrounded by my many and trusty guards, so that you shall not be able to stir one finger against the republic: many eyes and ears shall still observe and watch you, as they have hitherto done, though you shall not perceive them.

3. For what is there, O Catiline, that you can still expect, if night is not able to veil your nefarious meetings in darkness, and if private houses cannot conceal the voice of your conspiracy within their walls; if everything is seen and displayed? Change your mind: trust me: forget the slaughter and conflagration you are meditating. You are hemmed in on all sides; all your plans are clearer than the day to us; let me remind you of them. Do you recollect that on the 21st of October I said in the senate, that on a certain day, which was to be the 27th of October, C. Manlius, the satellite and servant of your audacity, would be in arms? Was I mistaken, Catiline, not only in so important, so atrocious, so incredible a fact, but, what is much more remarkable, in the very day? I said also in the senate that you had fixed the massacre of the nobles for the 28th of October, when many chief men of the senate had left Rome, not so much for the sake of saving themselves as of checking your designs. Can you deny that on that very day you were so hemmed in by my guards and my vigilance, that you were unable to stir one finger against the republic; when you said that you would be content with the flight of the rest, and the slaughter of us who remained? What? When you made sure that you would be able to seize Praeneste on the first of November by a nocturnal attack, did you not find that that colony was fortified by my order, by my garrison, by my watchfulness and care? You do nothing, you plan nothing, you think of nothing which I not only do not hear, but which I do not see and know every particular of.

4. Listen while I speak of the night before. You shall now see that I watch far more actively for the safety than you do for the destruction of the republic. I say that you came the night before (I will say nothing obscurely) into the Scythedealers’ street, to the house of Marcus Laeca; that many of your accomplices in the same insanity and wickedness came there too. Do you dare to deny it? Why are you silent? I will prove it if you do deny it; for I see here in the senate some men who were there with you. O ye immortal Gods, where on earth are we? In what city are we living? What constitution is ours? There are here, here in our body, O conscript fathers, in this the most holy and dignified assembly of the whole world, men who meditate my death, and the death of all of us, and the destruction of this city, and of the whole world; I, the
consul, see them; I ask them their opinion about the republic, and I do not yet attack, even by words, those who ought to be put to death by the sword. You were, then, O Catiline, at Laeca’s that night; you divided Italy into sections; you settled where every one was to go; you fixed whom you were to leave at Rome, whom you were to take with you; you portioned out the divisions of the city for conflagration; you undertook that you yourself would at once leave the city, and said that there was then only this to delay you, that I was still alive. Two Roman knights were found to deliver you from this anxiety, and to promise that very night, before daybreak, to slay me in my bed. All this I knew almost before your meeting had broken up. I strengthened and fortified my house with a stronger guard; I refused admittance, when they came, to those whom you sent in the morning to salute me, and of whom I had foretold to many eminent men that they would come to me at that time.

5. As, then, this is the case, O Catiline, continue as you have begun. Leave the city at last: the gates are open; depart. That Manlian camp of yours has been waiting too long for you as its general. And lead forth with you all your friends, or at least as many as you can; purge the city of your presence; you will deliver me from a great fear, when there is a wall between me and you. Among us you can dwell no longer — I will not bear it, I will not permit it, I will not tolerate it. Great thanks are due to the immortal gods, and to this very Jupiter Stator, in whose temple we are, the most ancient protector of this city, that we have already so often escaped so foul, so horrible, and so deadly an enemy to the republic. But the safety of the commonwealth must not be too often allowed to be risked on one man. As long as you, O Catiline, plotted against me while I was the consul-elect, I defended myself not with a public guard, but by my own private diligence. When, in the next consular comitia, you wished to slay me when I was actually consul, and your competitors also, in the Campus Martius, I checked your nefarious attempt by the assistance and resources of my own friends, without exciting any disturbance publicly. In short, as often as you attacked me, I by myself opposed you, and that, too, though I saw that my ruin was connected with great disaster to the republic. But now you are openly attacking the entire republic.

You are summoning to destruction and devastation the temples of the immortal gods, the houses of the city, the lives of all the citizens; in short, all Italy. Wherefore, since I do not yet venture to do that which is the best thing, and which belongs to my office and to the discipline of our ancestors, I will do that which is more merciful if we regard its rigour, and more expedient for the state. For if I order you to be put to death, the rest of the conspirators will still remain in the republic; if, as I have long been exhorting you, you depart, your companions, those worthless dregs of the republic, will be drawn off from the city too. What is the matter, Catiline? Do you hesitate to do that when I order you which you were already doing of your own accord? The consul orders an enemy to depart from the city. Do you ask me, Are you to go into banishment? I do not order it; but, if you consult me, I advise it.

6. For what is there, O Catiline, that can now afford you any pleasure in this city? For there is no one in it, except that band of profligate conspirators of yours, who does not fear you, no one who does not hate you. What brand of domestic baseness is not stamped upon your life? What disgraceful circumstance is wanting to your infamy in your private affairs? From what licentiousness have your eyes, from what atrocity have your hands, from what iniquity has your whole body ever abstained? Is there one youth, when you have once entangled him in the temptations of your corruption, to
whom you have not held out a sword for audacious crime, or a torch for licentious wickedness?

What? When lately by the death of your former wife you had made your house empty and ready for a new bridal, did you not even add another incredible wickedness to this wickedness? But I pass that over, and willingly allow it to be buried in silence, that so horrible a crime may not be seen to have existed in this city, and not to have been chastised. I pass over the ruin of your fortune, which you know is hanging over you against the ides of the very next month; I come to those things which relate not to the infamy of your private vices, not to your domestic difficulties and baseness, but to the welfare of the republic and to the lives and safety of us all…

[7] …If your parents feared and hated you, and if you could by no means pacify them, you would, I think, depart somewhere out of their sight. Now, your country, which is the common parent of all of us, hates and fears you, and has no other opinion of you, than that you are meditating parricide in her case; and will you neither feel awe of her authority, nor deference for her judgment, nor fear of her power?

And she, O Catiline, thus pleads with you, and after a manner silently speaks to you: There has now for many years been no crime committed but by you; no atrocity has taken place without you; you alone unpunished and unquestioned have murdered the citizens, have harassed and plundered the allies; you alone have had power not only to neglect all laws and investigations, but to overthrow and break through them. Your former actions, though they ought not to have been borne, yet I did bear as well as I could; but now that I should be wholly occupied with fear of you alone, that at every sound I should dread Catiline, that no design should seem possible to be entertained against me which does not proceed from your wickedness, this is no longer endurable. Depart, then, and deliver me from this fear; that, if it be a just one, I may not be destroyed; if an imaginary one, that at least I may at last cease to fear.

8. If, as I have said, your country were thus to address you, ought she not to obtain her request, even if she were not able to enforce it? What shall I say of your having given yourself into custody? What of your having said, for the sake of avoiding suspicion, that you were willing to dwell in the house of Marcus Lepidus? And when you were not received by him, you dared even to come to me, and begged me to keep you in my house; and when you had received answer from me that I could not possibly be safe in the same house with you, when I considered myself in great danger as long as we were in the same city, you came to Quintus Metellus, the praetor, and being rejected by him, you passed on to your associate, that most excellent man, Marcus Marcellus, who would be, I suppose you thought, most diligent in guarding you, most sagacious in suspecting you, and most bold in punishing you; but how far can we think that man ought to be from bonds and imprisonment who has already judged himself deserving of being given into custody?

Since, then, this is the case, do you hesitate, O Catiline, if you cannot remain here with tranquillity, to depart to some distant land, and to trust your life, saved from just and deserved punishment, to flight and solitude? Make a motion, say you, to the senate, (for that is what you demand), and if this body votes that you ought to go into banishment, you say that you will obey. I will not make such a motion, it is contrary to my principles, and yet I will let you see what these men think of you. Be gone from the city, O Catiline, deliver the republic from fear; depart into banishment, if that is the word you are waiting for. What now, O Catiline? Do you not perceive, do you not see the
silence of these men; they permit it, they say nothing; why wait you for the authority of their words when you see their wishes in their silence? …

9. And yet, why am I speaking? That anything may change your purpose? That you may ever amend your life? That you may meditate flight or think of voluntary banishment? I wish the gods may give you such a mind; though I see, if alarmed at my words you bring your mind to go into banishment, what a storm of unpopularity hangs over me, if not at present, while the memory of your wickedness is fresh, at all events hereafter. But it is worthwhile to incur that, as long as that is but a private misfortune of my own, and is unconnected with the dangers of the republic. But we cannot expect that you should be concerned at your own vices, that you should fear the penalties of the laws or that you should yield to the necessities of the republic, for you are not, O Catiline, one whom either shame can recall from infamy, or fear from danger, or reason from madness.

Wherefore, as I have said before, go forth, and if you wish to make me, your enemy as you call me, unpopular, go straight into banishment. I shall scarcely be able to endure all that will be said if you do so; I shall scarcely be able to support my load of unpopularity if you do go into banishment at the command of the consul; but if you wish to serve my credit and reputation, go forth with your ill-omened band of profligates; betake yourself to Manlius, rouse up the abandoned citizens, separate yourself from the good ones, wage war against your country, exult in your impious banditti, so that you may not seem to have been driven out by me and gone to strangers, but to have gone invited to your own friends….

10. You will go at last where your unbridled and mad desire has been long hurrying you. And this causes you no grief, but an incredible pleasure. Nature has formed you, desire has trained you, fortune has preserved you for this insanity. Not only did you never desire quiet, but you never even desired any war but a criminal one; you have collected a band of profligates and worthless men, abandoned not only by all fortune but even by hope.

Then what happiness will you enjoy! With what delight will you exult! In what pleasure will you revel! When in so numerous a body of friends, you neither hear nor see one good man. All the toils you have gone through have always pointed to this sort of life; your lying on the ground not merely to lie in wait to gratify your unclean desires, but even to accomplish crimes; your vigilance, not only when plotting against the sleep of husbands, but also against the goods of your murdered victims, have all been preparations for this. Now you have an opportunity of displaying your splendid endurance of hunger, of cold, of want of everything; by which in a short time you will find yourself worn out. All this I effected when I procured your rejection from the consulship, that you should be reduced to make attempts on your country as an exile, instead of being able to distress it as consul, and that that which had been wickedly undertaken by you should be called piracy rather than war.

11. Now that I may remove and avert, O conscript fathers, any in the least reasonable complaint from myself, listen, I beseech you, carefully to what I say, and lay it up in your inmost hearts and minds. In truth, if my country, which is far dearer to me than my life, if all Italy, if the whole republic were to address me, Marcus Tullius, what are you doing? Will you permit that man to depart whom you have ascertained to be an
enemy? Whom you see ready to become the general of the war? Whom you know to be expected in the camp of the enemy as their chief, the author of all this wickedness, the head of the conspiracy, the instigator of the slaves and abandoned citizens, so that he shall seem not driven out of the city by you, but let loose by you against the city? Will you not order him to be thrown into prison, to be hurried off to execution, to be put to death with the most prompt severity? What hinders you? Is it the customs of our ancestors? But even private men have often in this republic slain mischievous citizens. Is it the laws which have been passed about the punishment of Roman citizens? But in this city those who have rebelled against the republic have never had the rights of citizens. Do you fear odium with posterity? You are showing fine gratitude to the Roman people which has raised you, a man known only by your own actions, of no ancestral renown, through all the degrees of honour at so early an age to the very highest office, if from fear of unpopularity or of any danger you neglect the safety of your fellow-citizens. But if you have a fear of unpopularity, is that arising from the imputation of vigour and boldness, or that arising from that of inactivity and indecision most to be feared? When Italy is laid waste by war, when cities are attacked and houses in flames, do you not think that you will be then consumed by a perfect conflagration of hatred?

12. To this holy address of the republic, and to the feelings of those men who entertain the same opinion, I will make this short answer: If, O conscript fathers, I thought it best that Catiline should be punished with death, I would not have given the space of one hour to this gladiator to live in. If, forsooth, those excellent men and most illustrious cities not only did not pollute themselves, but even glorified themselves by the blood of Saturninus, and the Gracchi, and Flaccus, and many others of old time, surely I had no cause to fear lest for slaying this parricidal murderer of the citizens any unpopularity should accrue to me with posterity. And if it did threaten me to ever so great a degree, yet I have always been of the disposition to think unpopularity earned by virtue and glory, not unpopularity.

Though there are some men in this body who either do not see what threatens, or dissemble what they do see; who have fed the hope of Catiline by mild sentiments, and have strengthened the rising conspiracy by not believing it; influenced by whose authority many, and they not wicked, but only ignorant, if I punished him would say that I had acted cruelly and tyrannically. But I know that if he arrives at the camp of Manlius to which he is going, there will be no one so stupid as not to see that there has been a conspiracy, no one so hardened as not to confess it. But if this man alone were put to death, I know that this disease of the republic would be only checked for awhile, not eradicated for ever. But if he banishes himself, and takes with him all his friends, and collects at one point all the ruined men from every quarter, then not only will this full-grown plague of the republic be extinguished and eradicated, but also the root and seed of all future evils.

13. We have now for a long time, O conscript fathers, lived among these dangers and machinations of conspiracy; but somehow or other, the ripeness of all wickedness, and of this long-standing madness and audacity, has come to a head at the time of my consulship. But if this man alone is removed from this piratical crew, we may appear, perhaps, for a short time relieved from fear and anxiety, but the danger will settle down and lie hid in the veins and bowels of the republic. As it often happens that men afflicted with a severe disease, when they are tortured with heat and fever, if they drink cold water, seem at first to be relieved, but afterwards suffer more and more severely;
so this disease which is in the republic, if relieved by the punishment of this man, will only get worse and worse, as the rest will be still alive.

Wherefore, O conscript fathers, let the worthless begone; let them separate themselves from the good, let them collect in one place, let them, as I have often said before, be separated from us by a wall; let them cease to plot against the consul in his own house, to surround the tribunal of the city praetor, to besiege the senate-house with swords, to prepare brands and torches to burn the city; let it, in short, be written on the brow of every citizen, what are his sentiments about the republic. I promise you this, O conscript fathers, that there shall be so much diligence in us the consuls, so much authority in you, so much virtue in the Roman knights, so much unanimity in all good men, that you shall see everything made plain and manifest by the departure of Catiline, everything checked and punished.

With these omens, O Catiline, begone to your impious and nefarious war, to the great safety of the republic, to your own misfortune and injury, and to the destruction of those who have joined themselves to you in every wickedness and atrocity. Then do you, O Jupiter, who were consecrated by Romulus with the same auspices as this city, whom we rightly call the stay of this city and empire, repel this man and his companions from your altars and from the other temples, from the houses and walls of the city, from the lives and fortunes of all the citizens; and overwhelm all the enemies of good men, the foes of the republic, the robbers of Italy, men bound together by a treaty and infamous alliance of crimes, dead and alive, with eternal punishments.
Fellow countrymen,

Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battle-field of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

But, in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate — we cannot consecrate — we cannot hallow this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember, what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us, the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us — that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion — that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain — that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom — and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.
Emma Goldman

‘The political criminal of today must needs be the saint of the new age’

July 9, 1917

Gentlemen of the jury:

As in the case of my co-defendant, Alexander Berkman, this is also the first time in my life I have ever addressed a jury. I once had occasion to speak to three judges.

On the day after our arrest it was given out by the U.S. Marshal and the District Attorney's office that the 'big fish' of the No-Conscription activities had been caught, and that there would be no more trouble-makers and disturbers to interfere with the highly democratic effort of the Government to conscript its young manhood for the European slaughter. What a pity that the faithful servants of the Government, personified in the U.S. Marshal and the District Attorney, should have used such a weak and flimsy net for their big catch. The moment the anglers pulled their heavily laden net ashore, it broke, and all the labor was so much wasted energy.

The methods employed by Marshal McCarthy and his hosts of heroic warriors were sensational enough to satisfy the famous circus men, Barnum and Bailey. A dozen or more heroes dashing up two flights of stairs, prepared to stake their lives for their country, only to discover the two dangerous disturbers and trouble-makers, Alexander Berkman and Emma Goldman, in their separate offices, quietly at work at their desks, wielding not a sword, nor a gun or a bomb, but merely their pens! Verily, it required courage to catch such big fish.

Gentlemen of the jury, we have been in public life for twenty-seven years. We have been hauled into court, in and out of season — we have never denied our position. Even the police know that Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman are not shirkers. You have had occasion during this trial to convince yourselves that we do not deny. We have gladly and proudly claimed responsibility, not only for what we ourselves have said and written, but even for things written by others and with which we did not agree. Is it plausible, then, that we would go through the ordeal, trouble and expense of a lengthy trial to escape responsibility in this instance? A thousand times no! But we refuse to be tried on a trumped-up charge, or to be convicted by perjured testimony, merely because we are Anarchists and hated by the class whom we have openly fought for many years.

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Gentlemen of the jury, most of you, I take it, are believers in the teachings of Jesus. Bear in mind that he was put to death by those who considered his views as being against the law. I also take it that you are proud of your Americanism. Remember that those who fought and bled for your liberties were in their time considered as being against the law, as dangerous disturbers and trouble-makers. They not only preached
violence, but they carried out their ideas by throwing tea into the Boston harbor. They said that 'Resistance to tyranny is obedience to God.' They wrote a dangerous document called the Declaration of Independence. A document which continues to be dangerous to this day, and for the circulation of which a young man was sentenced to ninety days prison in a New York Court, only the other day. They were the Anarchists of their time — they were never within the law.

Your Government is allied with the French Republic. Need I call your attention to the historic fact that the great upheaval in France was brought about by extra-legal means? The Dantons, the Robespierres, the Marats, the Heberts, aye even the man who is responsible for the most stirring revolutionary music, the Marseillaise (which unfortunately has deteriorated into a war tune), even Camille Desmoulins, were never within the law. But for those great pioneers and rebels, France would have continued under the yoke of the idle Louis XVI, to whom the sport of shooting jack rabbits was more important than the destiny of the people of France.

Ah, gentlemen, on the very day when we were being tried for conspiracy and overt acts, your city officials and representatives welcomed with music and festivities the Russian Commission. Are you aware of the fact that nearly all of the members of that Commission have only recently been released from exile? The ideas they propagated were never within the law. For nearly a hundred years, from 1825 to 1917, the Tree of Liberty in Russia was watered by the blood of her martyrs. No greater heroism, no nobler lives had ever been dedicated to humanity. Not one of them worked within the law. I could continue to enumerate almost endlessly the hosts of men and women in every land and in every period whose ideas and ideals redeemed the world because they were not within the law.

Never can a new idea move within the law. It matters not whether that idea pertains to political and social changes or to any other domain of human thought and expression — to science, literature, music; in fact, everything that makes for freedom and joy and beauty must refuse to move within the law. How can it be otherwise? The law is stationary, fixed, mechanical, 'a chariot wheel' which grinds all alike without regard to time, place and condition, without ever taking into account cause and effect, without ever going into the complexity of the human soul.

Progress knows nothing of fixity. It cannot be pressed into a definite mould. It cannot bow to the dictum, 'I have ruled,' 'I am the regulating finger of God.' Progress is ever renewing, ever becoming, ever changing — never is it within the law.

If that be crime, we are criminals even like Jesus, Socrates, Galileo, Bruno, John Brown and scores of others. We are in good company, among those whom Havelock Ellis, the greatest living psychologist, describes as the political criminals recognized by the whole civilized world, except America, as men and women who out of deep love for humanity, out of a passionate reverence for liberty and an all-absorbing devotion to an ideal are ready to pay for their faith even with their blood. We cannot do otherwise if we are to be true to ourselves — we know that the political criminal is the precursor of human progress — the political criminal of today must needs be the hero, the martyr and the saint of the new age.

But, says the Prosecuting Attorney, the press and the unthinking rabble, in high and low station, 'that is a dangerous doctrine and unpatriotic at this time.' No doubt it is. But are we to be held responsible for something which is as unchangeable and unalienable as the very stars hanging in the heavens unto time and all eternity?
Gentlemen of the jury, we respect your patriotism. We would not, if we could, have you change its meaning for yourself. But may there not be different kinds of patriotism as there are different kinds of liberty? I for one cannot believe that love of one's country must needs consist in blindness to its social faults, to deafness to its social discords, of inarticulation to its social wrongs. Neither can I believe that the mere accident of birth in a certain country or the mere scrap of a citizen's paper constitutes the love of country.

I know many people — I am one of them — who were not born here, nor have they applied for citizenship, and who yet love America with deeper passion and greater intensity than many natives whose patriotism manifests itself by pulling, kicking, and insulting those who do not rise when the national anthem is played. Our patriotism is that of the man who loves a woman with open eyes. He is enchanted by her beauty, yet he sees her faults. So we, too, who know America, love her beauty, her richness, her great possibilities; we love her mountains, her canyons, her forests, her Niagara, and her deserts — above all do we love the people that have produced her wealth, her artists who have created beauty, her great apostles who dream and work for liberty — but with the same passionate emotion we hate her superficiality, her cant, her corruption, her mad, unscrupulous worship at the altar of the Golden Calf.

We say that if America has entered the war to make the world safe for democracy, she must first make democracy safe in America. How else is the world to take America seriously, when democracy at home is daily being outraged, free speech suppressed, peaceable assemblies broken up by overbearing and brutal gangsters in uniform; when free press is curtailed and every independent opinion gagged. Verily, poor as we are in democracy, how can we give of it to the world? We further say that a democracy conceived in the military servitude of the masses, in their economic enslavement, and nurtured in their tears and blood, is not democracy at all. It is despotism — the cumulative result of a chain of abuses which, according to that dangerous document, the Declaration of Independence, the people have the right to overthrow.

The District Attorney has dragged in our Manifesto, and he has emphasized the passage, ‘Resist conscription.’ Gentlemen of the jury, please remember that that is not the charge against us. But admitting that the Manifesto contains the expression, ‘Resist conscription,’ may I ask you, is there only one kind of resistance? Is there only the resistance which means the gun, the bayonet, the bomb or flying machine? Is there not another kind of resistance? May not the people simply fold their hands and declare, ‘We will not fight when we do not believe in the necessity of war’? May not the people who believe in the repeal of the Conscription Law, because it is unconstitutional, express their opposition in word and by pen, in meetings and in other ways? What right has the District Attorney to interpret that particular passage to suit himself? Moreover, gentlemen of the jury, I insist that the indictment against us does not refer to conscription. We are charged with a conspiracy against registration. And in no way or manner has the prosecution proven that we are guilty of conspiracy or that we have committed an overt act.

Gentlemen of the jury, you are not called upon to accept our views, to approve of them or to justify them. You are not even called upon to decide whether our views are within or against the law. You are called upon to decide whether the prosecution has proven that the defendants Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman have conspired to urge people not to register. And whether their speeches and writings represent overt acts.
Whatever your verdict, gentlemen, it cannot possibly affect the rising tide of discontent in this country against war which, despite all boasts, is a war for conquest and military power. Neither can it affect the ever increasing opposition to conscription which is a military and industrial yoke placed upon the necks of the American people. Least of all will your verdict affect those to whom human life is sacred, and who will not become a party to the world slaughter. Your verdict can only add to the opinion of the world as to whether or not justice and liberty are a living force in this country or a mere shadow of the past.

Your verdict may, of course, affect us temporarily, in a physical sense — it can have no effect whatever upon our spirit. For even if we were convicted and found guilty and the penalty were that we be placed against a wall and shot dead, I should nevertheless cry out with the great Luther: ‘Here I am and here I stand and I cannot do otherwise.’

And gentlemen, in conclusion let me tell you that my co-defendant, Mr. Berkman, was right when he said the eyes of America are upon you. They are upon you not because of sympathy for us or agreement with Anarchism. They are upon you because it must be decided sooner or later whether we are justified in telling people that we will give them democracy in Europe, when we have no democracy here? Shall free speech and free assemblage, shall criticism and opinion — which even the espionage bill did not include — be destroyed? Shall it be a shadow of the past, the great historic American past? Shall it be trampled underfoot by any detective, or policeman, anyone who decides upon it? Or shall free speech and free press and free assemblage continue to be the heritage of the American people?

Gentlemen of the jury, whatever your verdict will be, as far as we are concerned, nothing will be changed. I have held ideas all my life. I have publicly held my ideas for twenty-seven years. Nothing on earth would ever make me change my ideas except one thing; and that is, if you will prove to me that our position is wrong, untenable, or lacking in historic fact. But never would I change my ideas because I am found guilty. I may remind you of two great Americans, undoubtedly not unknown to you, gentlemen of the jury; Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. When Thoreau was placed in prison for refusing to pay taxes, he was visited by Ralph Waldo Emerson and Emerson said: ‘David, what are you doing in jail?’ and Thoreau replied: ‘Ralph, what are you doing outside, when honest people are in jail for their ideals?’ Gentlemen of the jury, I do not wish to influence you. I do not wish to appeal to your passions. I do not wish to influence you by the fact that I am a woman. I have no such desires and no such designs. I take it that you are sincere enough and honest enough and brave enough to render a verdict according to your convictions, beyond the shadow of a reasonable doubt.

Please forget that we are Anarchists. Forget that it is claimed that we propagated violence. Forget that something appeared in Mother Earth when I was thousands of miles away, three years ago. Forget all that, and merely consider the evidence. Have we been engaged in a conspiracy? Has that conspiracy been proven? Have we committed overt acts? Have those overt acts been proven? We for the defence say they have not been proven. And therefore your verdict must be not guilty.

But whatever your decision, the struggle must go on. We are but the atoms in the incessant human struggle towards the light that shines in the darkness — the ideal of economic, political and spiritual liberation of mankind!
Five score years ago, a great American, in whose symbolic shadow we stand, signed the Emancipation Proclamation. This momentous decree came as a great beacon light of hope to millions of Negro slaves who had been seared in the flames of withering injustice. It came as a joyous daybreak to end the long night of captivity.

But one hundred years later, we must face the tragic fact that the Negro is still not free. One hundred years later, the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination. One hundred years later, the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity. One hundred years later, the Negro is still languishing in the corners of American society and finds himself an exile in his own land. So we have come here today to dramatise an appalling condition.

In a sense we have come to our nation's capital to cash a check. When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was a promise that all men would be guaranteed the inalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note insofar as her citizens of color are concerned. Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America has given the Negro people a bad check which has come back marked 'insufficient funds.' But we refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt. We refuse to believe that there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity of this nation. So we have come to cash this check — a check that will give us upon demand the riches of freedom and the security of justice. We have also come to this hallowed spot to remind America of the fierce urgency of now. This is no time to engage in the luxury of cooling off or to take the tranquilizing drug of gradualism. Now is the time to rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to the sunlit path of racial justice. Now is the time to open the doors of opportunity to all of God's children. Now is the time to lift our nation from the quicksands of racial injustice to the solid rock of brotherhood.

It would be fatal for the nation to overlook the urgency of the moment and to underestimate the determination of the Negro. This sweltering summer of the Negro's legitimate discontent will not pass until there is an invigorating autumn of freedom and equality. Nineteen sixty-three is not an end, but a beginning. Those who hope that the Negro needed to blow off steam and will now be content will have a rude awakening if the nation returns to business as usual. There will be neither rest nor tranquillity in America until the Negro is granted his
citizenship rights. The whirlwinds of revolt will continue to shake the foundations of our nation until the bright day of justice emerges.

But there is something that I must say to my people who stand on the warm threshold which leads into the palace of justice. In the process of gaining our rightful place we must not be guilty of wrongful deeds. Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred.

We must forever conduct our struggle on the high plane of dignity and discipline. We must not allow our creative protest to degenerate into physical violence. Again and again we must rise to the majestic heights of meeting physical force with soul force. The marvellous new militancy which has engulfed the Negro community must not lead us to distrust of all white people, for many of our white brothers, as evidenced by their presence here today, have come to realize that their destiny is tied up with our destiny and their freedom is inextricably bound to our freedom. We cannot walk alone.

And as we walk, we must make the pledge that we shall march ahead. We cannot turn back. There are those who are asking the devotees of civil rights, ‘When will you be satisfied?’ We can never be satisfied as long as our bodies, heavy with the fatigue of travel, cannot gain lodging in the motels of the highways and the hotels of the cities. We cannot be satisfied as long as the Negro's basic mobility is from a smaller ghetto to a larger one. We can never be satisfied as long as a Negro in Mississippi cannot vote and a Negro in New York believes he has nothing for which to vote. No, no, we are not satisfied, and we will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream.

I am not unmindful that some of you have come here out of great trials and tribulations. Some of you have come fresh from narrow cells. Some of you have come from areas where your quest for freedom left you battered by the storms of persecution and staggered by the winds of police brutality. You have been the veterans of creative suffering. Continue to work with the faith that unearned suffering is redemptive.

Go back to Mississippi, go back to Alabama, go back to Georgia, go back to Louisiana, go back to the slums and ghettos of our northern cities, knowing that somehow this situation can and will be changed. Let us not wallow in the valley of despair.

I say to you today, my friends, that in spite of the difficulties and frustrations of the moment, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream.

I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: ‘We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal.’

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit
down together at a table of brotherhood.

I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a desert state, sweltering with the heat of injustice and oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.

I have a dream that my four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

I have a dream today.

I have a dream that one day the state of Alabama, whose governor's lips are presently dripping with the words of interposition and nullification, will be transformed into a situation where little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls and walk together as sisters and brothers.

I have a dream today.

I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.

This is our hope. This is the faith with which I return to the South. With this faith we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. With this faith we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. With this faith we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day.

This will be the day when all of God's children will be able to sing with a new meaning, 'My country, 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing. Land where my fathers died, land of the pilgrim's pride, from every mountainside, let freedom ring.'

And if America is to be a great nation this must become true. So let freedom ring from the prodigious hilltops of New Hampshire. Let freedom ring from the mighty mountains of New York. Let freedom ring from the heightening Alleghenies of Pennsylvania!

Let freedom ring from the snowcapped Rockies of Colorado!

Let freedom ring from the curvaceous peaks of California!

But not only that; let freedom ring from Stone Mountain of Georgia!

Let freedom ring from Lookout Mountain of Tennessee!

Let freedom ring from every hill and every molehill of Mississippi. From every mountainside, let freedom ring.
When we let freedom ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, ‘Free at last! free at last! thank God Almighty, we are free at last!’
Denise Levertov

Statement for a Television Program
1972

The following statement was written in response to an invitation to ‘comment on any topic, eg, poetry, women, the war,’ on a program taped weekly by a major TV network (NBC). I could not in these times choose any ‘topic’ but the war; however, my text — which had to be submitted a week before being taped, and which was written during the interval between Nixon’s two televised speeches in May 1972 — was rejected. ‘I feel,’ wrote the producer, ‘that, deep as my own emotions are about this futile war, it would be inappropriate for me to use it at this time. My decision is shaped not by your piece — you write so very movingly — but by the number of Vietnam statements we have already had on the program. They cover a wide range of attitudes and angles, and with them I effected a coverage and balance which I think best to let stand.’

It seems to me that a ‘balanced’ view of genocide and of actions which are leading directly toward the extinction of life on earth is itself a kind of insanity. It is evident, moreover, that a program that first invites people to speak on whatever they feel it is important to say, and then rejects their words in the name of ‘balanced coverage,’ is a little short on sincerity. Here is my statement:

I have been asked to speak on this program because I am a poet. One of the obligations of the writer, and perhaps especially of the poet, is to say or sing all that he or she can, to deal with as much of the world as becomes possible to him or her in language. I and most of my fellow American poets nowadays find ourselves inevitably — of necessity — writing more and more poems of grief, of rage, concerning the despoilment of the earth and of all life upon it, of the systematic destruction of all that we feel passionate love for, both by the greed of industry and by the mass murder we call war. We are living at war: the shame and horror of being citizens of the country which, in its ruthless imperialism, is not only ravaging Southeast Asia but, with its military bases, its Polaris submarines, the machinations of its CIA, and the tentacles of its giant corporations, is everywhere the prime force of anti-life and oppression — this shame and horror cast their shadow over all we say, feel, and do. The spring sunshine, the new leaves: we still see them, we still love them: but in what poignant contrast is their beauty and simple goodness to the evil we are conscious of day and night. And this evil, this blight, this war in which our whole lives are being spent, is present at home, here in the U.S., as well as abroad, in the form of racism, of gross injustice, of poverty and hunger in the midst of the very richest country in the world. As corrupt and self-seeking politicians erode the Constitution and bring us daily closer to outright fascism, the poet is turned away from his impulse to sing, to testify in patterns of words to the miracle of life, and is driven willy-nilly to warn, to curse, to gnash the teeth of language; and at the same time, living always in the war shadow, to celebrate the courage and high spirit of all who dare to struggle, Davids to the Goliaths of capitalism (the expression of man’s greed) and imperialism (the expression of man’s lust for power); to celebrate the courage and tenacity of the so-called ‘enemy’ in Southeast Asia, and of all who here at home resist the system — people like Angela Davis, Dan and Phil Berrigan, Cesar Chavez; and to declare solidarity with them and with all who share their struggle.

Poets differ from other people only in having a specially intimate relation to words. When I say I speak as a poet, it is the same as to say I speak as a human being. In the name of humanness, then, I call on my fellow humans to stop the war; but not to think
that by stopping the present slaughter in Vietnam we will have done the job — for that slaughter is only one manifestation of the total war that surrounds us. We could begin if we wanted to: we could stop the bombing tomorrow if every individual who would like to see an end to U.S. involvement would say 'No Business as Usual' and ACT on those words. It is our own timidity that makes us feel powerless. If we acted to bring about a general strike and economic boycott, we would see we have more power than we think. But even if we stop the bombing and get rid of Nixon, let us understand that though it would be a beginning — and a good one — it would be ineffectual unless it led to a thorough change — outward and inward, institutional and personal — of the system Nixon and his bombs are part of. Stop the bombing. Declare peace. Change the system.
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 G.B. 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 Andre 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 emphasize 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 summarize 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 emphasize 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 polarize 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 homogenized — 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.
My dear fellow citizens,

For forty years you heard from my predecessors on this day different variations on the same theme: how our country was flourishing, how many million tons of steel we produced, how happy we all were, how we trusted our government, and what bright perspectives were unfolding in front of us.

I assume you did not propose me for this office so that I, too, would lie to you.

Our country is not flourishing. The enormous creative and spiritual potential of our nation is not being used sensibly. Entire branches of industry are producing goods that are of no interest to anyone, while we are lacking the things we need. A state which calls itself a workers' state humiliates and exploits workers. Our obsolete economy is wasting the little energy we have available. A country that once could be proud of the educational level of its citizens spends so little on education that it ranks today as seventy-second in the world. We have polluted the soil, rivers and forests bequeathed to us by our ancestors, and we have today the most contaminated environment in Europe. Adults in our country die earlier than in most other European countries.

...We live in a contaminated moral environment. We fell morally ill because we became used to saying something different from what we thought. We learned not to believe in anything, to ignore one another, to care only about ourselves. Concepts such as love, friendship, compassion, humility or forgiveness lost their depth and dimension, and for many of us they represented only psychological peculiarities, or they resembled gone-astay greetings from ancient times, a little ridiculous in the era of computers and spaceships. Only a few of us were able to cry out loud that the powers that be should not be all-powerful, and that special farms, which produced ecologically pure and top-quality food just for them, should send their produce to schools, children's homes and hospitals if our agriculture was unable to offer them to all.

The previous regime — armed with its arrogant and intolerant ideology — reduced man to a force of production, and nature to a tool of production. In this it attacked both their very substance and their mutual relationship. It reduced gifted and autonomous people, skilfully working in their own country, to the nuts and bolts of some monstrously huge, noisy and stinking machine, whose real meaning was not clear to anyone. It could not do more than slowly but inexorably wear out itself and all its nuts and bolts.

When I talk about the contaminated moral atmosphere, I am not talking just about the gentlemen who eat organic vegetables and do not look out of the plane windows. I am talking about all of us. We had all become used to the totalitarian system and accepted it as an unchangeable fact and thus helped to perpetuate it. In other words, we are all — though naturally to differing extents — responsible for the operation of the totalitarian machinery. None of us is just its victim. We are all also its co-creators.

Why do I say this? It would be very unreasonable to understand the sad legacy of the last forty years as something alien, which some distant relative bequeathed to us. On the contrary, we have to accept this legacy as a sin we committed against ourselves. If we accept it as such, we will understand that it is up to us all, and up to us only to do something about it. We cannot blame the previous rulers for everything, not only
because it would be untrue, but also because it would blunt the duty that each of us faces today: namely, the obligation to act independently, freely, reasonably and quickly. Let us not be mistaken: the best government in the world, the best parliament and the best president, cannot achieve much on their own. And it would be wrong to expect a general remedy from them alone. Freedom and democracy include participation and therefore responsibility from us all.

If we realize this, then all the horrors that the new Czechoslovak democracy inherited will cease to appear so terrible. If we realise this, hope will return to our hearts.

In the effort to rectify matters of common concern, we have something to lean on. The recent period — and in particular the last six weeks of our peaceful revolution — has shown the enormous human, moral and spiritual potential and civic culture that slumbered in our society under the enforced mask of apathy. Whenever someone categorically claimed that we were this or that, I always objected that society is a very mysterious creature and that it is unwise to trust only the face it presents to you. I am happy that I was not mistaken. Everywhere in the world people wonder where those meek, humiliated, sceptical and seemingly cynical citizens of Czechoslovakia found the marvellous strength to shake the totalitarian yoke from their shoulders in several weeks, and in a decent and peaceful way. And let us ask: Where did the young people who never knew another system get their desire for truth, their love of free thought, their political ideas, their civic courage and civic prudence? How did it happen that their parents — the very generation that had been considered lost — joined them? How is it that so many people immediately knew what to do and none needed any advice or instruction?

I think there are two main reasons for the hopeful face of our present situation. First of all, people are never just a product of the external world; they are also able to relate themselves to something superior, however systematically the external world tries to kill that ability in them. Secondly, the humanistic and democratic traditions, about which there had been so much idle talk, did after all slumber in the unconsciousness of our nations and ethnic minorities, and were inconspicuously passed from one generation to another, so that each of us could discover them at the right time and transform them into deeds.

Masaryk based his politics on morality. Let us try, in a new time and in a new way, to restore this concept of politics. Let us teach ourselves and others that politics should be an expression of a desire to contribute to the happiness of the community rather than of a need to cheat or rape the community. Let us teach ourselves and others that politics can be not simply the art of the possible, especially if this means the art of speculation, calculation, intrigue, secret deals and pragmatic manoeuvring, but that it can also be the art of the impossible, that is, the art of improving ourselves and the world.

We are a small country, yet at one time we were the spiritual crossroads of Europe. Is there a reason why we could not again become one? Would it not be another asset with which to repay the help of others that we are going to need?

Our homegrown Mafia, those who do not look out of the plane windows and who eat specially fed pigs, may still be around and at times may muddy the waters, but they are no longer our main enemy. Even less so is our main enemy any kind of international Mafia. Our main enemy today is our own bad traits: indifference to the common good,
vanity, personal ambition, selfishness, and rivalry. The main struggle will have to be fought on this field.

There are free elections and an election campaign ahead of us. Let us not allow this struggle to dirty the so-far clean face of our gentle revolution. Let us not allow the sympathies of the world, which we have won so fast, to be equally rapidly lost through our becoming entangled in the jungle of skirmishes for power. Let us not allow the desire to serve oneself to bloom once again under the stately garb of the desire to serve the common good. It is not really important now which party, club or group prevails in the elections. The important thing is that the winners will be the best of us, in the moral, civic, political and professional sense, regardless of their political affiliations. The future policies and prestige of our state will depend on the personalities we select, and later, elect to our representative bodies...

In conclusion, I would like to say that I want to be a president who will speak less and work more. To be a president who will not only look out of the windows of his airplane but who, first and foremost, will always be present among his fellow citizens and listen to them well.

You may ask what kind of republic I dream of. Let me reply: I dream of a republic independent, free, and democratic, of a republic economically prosperous and yet socially just; in short, of a humane republic that serves the individual and that therefore holds the hope that the individual will serve it in turn. Of a republic of well-rounded people, because without such people it is impossible to solve any of our problems, human, economic, ecological, social, or political.

The most distinguished of my predecessors opened his first speech with a quotation from the great Czech educator Komensky. Allow me to conclude my first speech with my own paraphrase of the same statement:

People, your government has returned to you!
We do not know this Australian's name and we never will. We do not know his rank or his battalion. We do not know where he was born, nor precisely how and when he died. We do not know where in Australia he had made his home or when he left it for the battlefields of Europe. We do not know his age or his circumstances – whether he was from the city or the bush; what occupation he left to become a soldier; what religion, if he had a religion; if he was married or single. We do not know who loved him or whom he loved. If he had children we do not know who they are. His family is lost to us as he was lost to them. We will never know who this Australian was.

Yet he has always been among those whom we have honoured. We know that he was one of the 45,000 Australians who died on the Western Front. One of the 416,000 Australians who volunteered for service in the First World War. One of the 324,000 Australians who served overseas in that war and one of the 60,000 Australians who died on foreign soil. One of the 100,000 Australians who have died in wars this century.

He is all of them. And he is one of us.

This Australia and the Australia he knew are like foreign countries. The tide of events since he died has been so dramatic, so vast and all-consuming, a world has been created beyond the reach of his imagination.

He may have been one of those who believed that the Great War would be an adventure too grand to miss. He may have felt that he would never live down the shame of not going. But the chances are he went for no other reason than that he believed it was the duty he owed his country and his King.

Because the Great War was a mad, brutal, awful struggle, distinguished more often than not by military and political incompetence; because the waste of human life was so terrible that some said victory was scarcely discernible from defeat; and because the war which was supposed to end all wars in fact sowed the seeds of a second even more terrible war – we might think this Unknown Soldier died in vain.

But, in honouring our war dead, as we always have and as we do today, we declare that this is not true. For out of the war came a lesson which transcended the horror and tragedy and the inexcusable folly. It was a lesson about ordinary people – and the lesson was that they were not ordinary. On all sides they were the heroes of that war; not the generals and the politicians but the soldiers and sailors and nurses – those who taught us to endure hardship, to show courage, to be bold as well as resilient, to believe in ourselves, to stick together.

The Unknown Australian Soldier whom we are interring today was one of those who, by his deeds, proved that real nobility and grandeur belongs, not to empires and nations, but to the people on whom they, in the last resort, always depend. That is surely at the heart of the ANZAC story, the Australian legend which emerged from the war. It is a legend not of sweeping military victories so much as triumphs...
against the odds, of courage and ingenuity in adversity. It is a legend of free and independent spirits whose discipline derived less from military formalities and customs than from the bonds of mateship and the demands of necessity. It is a democratic tradition, the tradition in which Australians have gone to war ever since.

This Unknown Australian is not interred here to glorify war over peace; or to assert a soldier's character above a civilian's; or one race or one nation or one religion above another; or men above women; or the war in which he fought and died above any other war; or one generation above any that has been or will come later.

The Unknown Soldier honours the memory of all those men and women who laid down their lives for Australia. His tomb is a reminder of what we have lost in war and what we have gained.

We have lost more than 100,000 lives, and with them all their love of this country and all their hope and energy.

We have gained a legend: a story of bravery and sacrifice and, with it, a deeper faith in ourselves and our democracy, and a deeper understanding of what it means to be Australian.

It is not too much to hope, therefore, that this Unknown Australian Soldier might continue to serve his country — he might enshrine a nation's love of peace and remind us that, in the sacrifice of the men and women whose names are recorded here, there is faith enough for all of us.

The Hon. P. J. Keating MP
Prime Minister of Australia
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 Aboriginals 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 practiced 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.
It is a wonderful but daunting task that has fallen on me to say a few words by way of opening this Forum, the greatest concourse of women (joined by a few brave men!) that has ever gathered on our planet. I want to try and voice some of the common hopes which firmly unite us in all our splendid diversity.

But first I would like to explain why I cannot be with you in person today. Last month I was released from almost six years of house arrest. The regaining of my freedom has in turn imposed a duty on me to work for the freedom of other women and men in my country who have suffered far more — and who continue to suffer far more — than I have. It is this duty which prevents me from joining you today. Even sending this message to you has not been without difficulties. But the help of those who believe in international cooperation and freedom of expression has enabled me to overcome the obstacles. They made it possible for me to make a small contribution to this great celebration of the struggle of women to mould their own destiny and to influence the fate of our global village.

The opening plenary of this Forum will be presenting an overview of the global forces affecting the quality of life of the human community and the challenges they pose for the global community as a whole and for women in particular as we approach the twenty-first century. However, with true womanly understanding, the Convener of this Forum suggested that among these global forces and challenges, I might wish to concentrate on those matters which occupy all my waking thoughts these days: peace, security, human rights and democracy. I would like to discuss these issues particularly in the context of the participation of women in politics and governance.

For millennia women have dedicated themselves almost exclusively to the task of nurturing, protecting and caring for the young and the old, striving for the conditions of peace that favour life as a whole. To this can be added the fact that, to the best of my knowledge, no war was ever started by women. But it is women and children who have always suffered most in situations of conflict. Now that we are gaining control of the primary historical role imposed on us of sustaining life in the context of the home and family, it is time to apply in the arena of the world the wisdom and experience thus gained in activities of peace over so many thousands of years. The education and empowerment of women throughout the world cannot fail to result in a more caring, tolerant, just and peaceful life for all.

If to these universal benefits of the growing emancipation of women can be added the ‘peace dividend’ for human development offered by the end of the Cold War, spending less on the war toys of grown men and much more on the urgent needs of humanity as a whole, then truly the next millennium will be an age the like to which has never been seen in human history. But there still remain many obstacles to be overcome before we can achieve this goal. And not least among these obstacles are intolerance and insecurity.
This year is the International Year for Tolerance. The United Nations has recognised that ‘tolerance, human rights, democracy and peace are closely related. Without tolerance, the foundations for democracy and respect for human rights cannot be strengthened, and the achievements of peace will remain elusive’. My own experience during the years I have been engaged in the democracy movement in Burma has convinced me of the need to emphasize the positive aspects of tolerance. It is not enough simply to ‘live and let live’: genuine tolerance requires an active effort to try to understand the point of view of others; it implies broad-mindedness and vision, as well as confidence in one’s own ability to meet new challenges without resorting to intransigence or violence. In societies where men are truly confident of their own worth women are not merely ‘tolerated’, they are valued. Their opinions are listened to with respect, they are given their rightful place in shaping the society in which they live.

There is an outmoded Burmese proverb still recited by men, who wish to deny that women too can play a part in bringing necessary change and progress to their society: ‘The dawn rises only when the rooster crows’. But Burmese people today are well aware of the scientific reason behind the rising of dawn and the falling of dusk. And the intelligent rooster surely realizes that it is because dawn comes that it crows and not the other way round. It crows to welcome the light that has come to relieve the darkness of night. It is not the prerogative of men alone to bring light to this world: women with their capacity for compassion and self-sacrifice, their courage and perseverance, have done much to dissipate the darkness of intolerance and hate, suffering and despair.

Often the other side of the coin of intolerance is insecurity. Insecure people tend to be intolerant, and their intolerance unleashes forces that threaten the security of others. And where there is no security there can be no lasting peace. In its Human Development Report for last year, the UNDP noted that human security ‘is not a concern with weapons — it is a concern with human life and dignity’. The struggle for democracy and human rights in Burma is a struggle for life and dignity. It is a struggle that encompasses our political, social and economic aspirations. The people of my country want the two freedoms that spell security: freedom from want and freedom from war. It is want that has driven so many of our young girls across our borders to a life of sexual slavery where they are subject to constant humiliation and ill-treatment. It is fear of persecution for their political beliefs that has made so many of our people feel that even in their own homes they cannot live in dignity and security. Traditionally, the home is the domain of the woman. But there has never been a guarantee that she can live out her life there safe and unmolested. There are countless women who are subjected to severe cruelty within the heart of the family which should be their haven. And in times of crisis when their menfolk are unable to give them protection, women have to face the harsh challenges of the world outside while continuing to discharge their duties within the home.

Many of my male colleagues who have suffered imprisonment for their part in the democracy movement have spoken of the great debt of gratitude they owe their womenfolk, particularly their wives, who stood by them firmly, tender as mothers nursing their newly born, brave as lionesses defending their young. These magnificent human beings who have done so much to aid their men in the struggle for justice and peace — how much more could they not achieve if given the opportunity to work in their own right for the good of their country and of the world?
Our endeavours have also been sustained by the activities of strong and principled women all over the world who have campaigned not only for my own release but, more importantly, for our cause. I cannot let this opportunity pass without speaking of the gratitude we feel towards our sisters everywhere, from heads of governments to busy housewives. Their efforts have been a triumphant demonstration of female solidarity and of the power of an ideal to cross all frontiers.

In my country at present, women have no participation in the higher levels of government and none whatsoever in the judiciary. Even within the democratic movement only 14 out of the 485 MPs elected in 1990 were women — all from my own party, the National League for Democracy. These 14 women represent less than three percent of the total number of successful candidates. They, like their male colleagues, have not been permitted to take office since the outcome of those elections has been totally ignored. Yet the very high performance of women in our educational system and in the management of commercial enterprises proves their enormous potential to contribute to the betterment of society in general. Meanwhile our women have yet to achieve those fundamental rights of free expression, association and security of life denied also to their menfolk.

The adversities that we have had to face together have taught all of us involved in the struggle to build a truly democratic political system in Burma that there are no gender barriers that cannot be overcome. The relationship between men and women should, and can be, characterized not by patronizing behavior or exploitation, but by metta (that is to say loving kindness), partnership and trust. We need mutual respect and understanding between men and women, instead of patriarchal domination and degradation, which are expressions of violence and engender counter-violence. We can learn from each other and help one another to moderate the ‘gender weaknesses’ imposed on us by traditional or biological factors.

There is an age-old prejudice the world over to the effect that women talk too much. But is this really a weakness? Could it not in fact be strength? Recent scientific research on the human brain has revealed that women are better at verbal skills while men tend towards physical action. Psychological research has shown on the other hand that disinformation engendered by men has far more damaging effect on its victims than feminine gossip. Surely these discoveries indicate that women have a most valuable contribution to make in situations of conflict, by leading the way to solutions based on dialogue rather than on viciousness or violence?

The Buddhist pavarana ceremony at the end of the rainy season retreat was instituted by the Lord Buddha, who did not want human beings to live in silence [I quote] ‘like dumb animals’. This ceremony, during which monks ask mutual forgiveness for any offence given during the retreat, can be said to be a council of truth and reconciliation. It might also be considered a forerunner of that most democratic of institutions, the parliament, a meeting of peoples gathered together to talk over their shared problems. All the world’s great religions are dedicated to the generation of happiness and harmony. This demonstrates the fact that together with the combative instincts of man there co-exists a spiritual aspiration for mutual understanding and peace.

This forum of non-governmental organizations represents the belief in the ability of intelligent human beings to resolve conflicting interests through exchange and dialogue. It also represents the conviction that governments alone cannot resolve all the problems of their countries. The watchfulness and active cooperation of organizations outside the spheres of officialdom are necessary to ensure the four
essential components of the human development paradigm as identified by the UNDP: productivity, equity, sustainability and empowerment. The last is particularly relevant: it requires that ‘development must be by people, not only for them. People must participate fully in the decisions and processes that shape their lives. In other words, people must be allowed to play a significant role in the governance of the country. And ‘people’ include women, who make up at least half of the world’s population.

The last six years afforded me much time and food for thought. I came to the conclusion that the human race is not divided into two opposing camps of good and evil. It is made up of those who are capable of learning and those who are incapable of doing so. Here I am not talking of learning in the narrow sense of acquiring an academic education, but of learning as the process of absorbing those lessons of life that enable us to increase peace and happiness in our world. Women in their roles as mothers have traditionally assumed the responsibility of teaching children values that will guide them throughout their lives. It is time we were given the full opportunity to use our natural teaching skills to contribute towards building a modern world that can withstand the tremendous challenges of the technological revolution which has in turn brought revolutionary changes in social values.

As we strive to teach others we must have the humility to acknowledge that we too still have much to learn. And we must have the flexibility to adapt to the changing needs of the world around us. Women who have been taught that modesty and pliancy are among the prized virtues of our gender are marvellously equipped for the learning process. But they must be given the opportunity to turn these often merely passive virtues into positive assets for the society in which they live.

These, then, are our common hopes that unite us — that as the shackles of prejudice and intolerance fall from our own limbs we can together strive to identify and remove the impediments to human development everywhere. The mechanisms by which this great task is to be achieved provided the proper focus of this great Forum. I feel sure that women throughout the world who, like me, cannot be with you join me now in sending you all our prayers and good wishes for a joyful and productive meeting.

I thank you.
Mary McAleese, President of Ireland

The Defence of Freedom

Edited version of speech delivered to The Irish Times/Harvard University Colloquium, 16 October 1998

Human rights are the oxygen of civilisation. Nobody owns them. Nobody has authority to deny them to another. Sir Edward Coke — speaking of the Magna Carta in 1628, in an era before the introduction of gender-neutral language — proclaimed that ‘human rights is such a fellow that he will have no sovereign’. They are the birthright of all.

The Declaration of Human Rights is couched in eloquent and persuasive language — the kind of language designed to comfort the oppressed, to challenge the oppressor. But when we move from its broad brush to translating its effects and ethos into everyday life as it is lived in the chaos of the world, we also have to acknowledge the perverse complexity of some of the issues we are called on to address.

Freedom of speech is one such issue and it is upon that freedom I want to reflect in this address, raising more questions than I have answers but offering (I hope) some insights.

Article 19 of the Declaration of Human Rights proclaims that ‘everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.’ Article 40 of the Irish Constitution (1937) declares that ‘it is the right of the citizens to express freely their convictions and opinions.’

And of course the famous First Amendment to the American Constitution states that ‘Congress shall make no law, abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press or the right of people peaceably to assemble and to petition the government for redress of grievances.’

By freedom of speech we generally mean, and I mean here, freedom of expression — not just words but images, symbols and even demonstrations or marches through which views and convictions are expressed or cultural heritage showcased.

Clearly there are many instances (Northern Ireland being one of them) where civil rights have been won and other important social grievances have been redressed by people who asserted themselves verbally in ways which were at first strongly resisted by their fellow citizens and the authorities.

The history of the debate concerning freedom of expression is full of ironies. Northern Irish Catholics, who were themselves beneficiaries of a civil rights movement which staunchly asserted its right to march, now find themselves challenging the demands of the Protestant Orange Order to march where it pleases.

When Orangemen proclaim their right to ‘march the queen’s highway’ why then is there no simple convergence of interest — no clear if even grudging recognition that if all citizens are to be equally accorded fundamental freedom of speech then we must be prepared to tolerate marches by people whose views we disagree with?
A minority of Orange marches are deeply controversial. In asking ourselves why this should be so, it is worth looking for a moment beyond Northern Ireland to other societies in which the exercise of freedom of expression has been a source of dispute.

An American visitor spoke to me at the height of this year’s trouble at Drumcree, near Portadown in Northern Ireland. An Orange march had been banned and was refusing to disperse. In the ensuing violence across Northern Ireland three little children were to be burned to death. Yet during the stand-off my American visitor said that in the United States the march would in all likelihood have gone through with the full backing of the law.

As Prof. Samuel Walker has written in his fine book on the history of hate speech in the United States, this country ‘protects even the most offensive forms of expression’ and — in his view — the First Amendment protection of freedom of speech is ‘one of the glories of American society.’ I too greatly admire the robust manner in which the Supreme Court of the United States of America has defended and promoted free speech. However, you also in this country have faced situations of choosing between one person’s freedom of speech and another’s freedom to live quietly in peace — situations where one person’s voice speaking freely has consigned another to fear and terror.

The truth is that sometimes the exercise of freedom of expression is actually experienced as personally oppressive and humiliating, especially (although not exclusively) by the weak, the powerless and the deprived.

An American case of 1992 is regarded by some observers as a landmark in this whole debate. The Jones family, a black family living in a white neighbourhood in St Paul, Minnesota, were subjected to harassment. One night a burning cross, the symbol of racist persecution, was placed within the fenced yard of their house. Robert Viktora was among those who put the burning cross there. He was prosecuted under a city ordinance directed against the display of a symbol which one knows, or has reason to know, ‘arouses anger, alarm or resentment in others on the basis of race, color, creed, religion or gender…’

The US Supreme Court upheld the First Amendment rights of Robert Viktora and struck down his conviction in a lower court.

To return to Northern Ireland, its annual Orange marching season provides some further examples of how one person’s freedom of expression can be felt by another as a restriction of his or her own rights.

Most Orangemen see their marches not just as an historic tradition but as an expression and celebration of their hard-won rights and liberties. But, conversely, some of their parades are seen by Catholic or nationalist residents of the areas through which they pass — and often by the wider nationalist community as well — not just as a major intrusion on their right to live peacefully in their own homes but as an assertion of superiority and an expression of a continued reluctance to accept the full equality of the two communities.

In the past, the Catholic community collectively tended to choose to stay silent in the face of unwelcome parades. In recent years, Catholic residents’ groups have exercised their freedom of speech to talk back, to protest at the marches and to insist that their sensitivities must be taken into account in the routing and timing of marches.
There have been, often due to an escalation of tensions far away from the locations themselves, confrontations, stand-offs, and sometimes appalling violence, even deaths. Inevitably, people other than those directly concerned become involved.

The Good Friday agreement sends out a clear message — the way forward is through affording each other respect and tolerance, through accepting diversity, ultimately through consensus and partnership.

It is vital, therefore, that those of us who support freedom of expression do not resort to absolutist arguments, as though we were proclaiming the divine right of kings, as though an appeal to rock-hard principle could resolve the dilemma of conflicting rights both neatly and comprehensively.

There are some important questions here — questions about the voice or voicelessness of the victim which are sometimes dismissed or finessed from the agenda when free speech is discussed. The experiences of people on both sides in Northern Ireland can provide useful insights in answering these questions.

Northern Ireland in particular has a very creditable civil code which provides legal redress for verbal sexual, religious or racial harassment in the workplace. It effectively outlaws certain language and behaviour notwithstanding the commitment to freedom of speech.

Out on the street, however, the same conduct which is unacceptable in the workplace — or, indeed, conduct which is much worse — may be, and often is, protected by appeals to freedom of speech. Even in countries where constitutional provisions speak of the equality and dignity of each human person — and indeed pledge to vindicate that equality by law — there is freedom to express views which promote racial supremacy, gender inequality or religious hatred.

Arguing that opponents have an equal right to talk back, states founded on a commitment to human rights sometimes adopt a deliberately neutral pose on the public expression of views anathema to those very human rights, provided that the views expressed stop short of immediate incitement.

However, being entitled to talk back and actually talking back are two different things and in my view it is worth reflecting on whether and to what extent we encourage and promote effective talk-back; that is to say the kind of talk-back which ensures that free speech is not just a licence for the voluble bully.

Take the immigrant issue for example — an issue affecting so many countries, including my own. Sometimes language used about immigrants is inconsiderate and wounding. Our freedom of speech can be a whip on their backs. Yes, some people rally to defend them but what of the woundedness that goes deep, what of the silent places into which they creep — fearful for their present and terrified for their future?

I need hardly remind a Massachusetts audience that we Irish have often been immigrants ourselves and have been on the receiving end of hate speech.

One month ago when I was in England, I visited an exhibition on Irish travelling people who live there — in another era these people were called Irish gypsies or itinerants. Children at the exhibition put on a little play. It told of their experiences on the street
and the names which they were called — ‘dirty gippos’ was the most repeatable of them.

What does it mean to children like them to tell them that their tormentors are exercising their freedom of speech, that the state defends their right to do so?

Was not this what was said to the inhabitants of Skokie, Illinois, where in 1977 a small Nazi organization asserted the right to parade through a largely Jewish village? The Nazis’ case was controversially supported on First Amendment grounds by the American Civil Liberties Union and it succeeded in the Circuit Court of Appeals. The US Supreme Court refused to hear an appeal. In the end, the planned Nazi march did not go ahead in Skokie itself but there remains to this day a real question about how far we can acknowledge responsive silence, silence provoked by fear and subtle, insidious intimidation.

How far should we acknowledge that the marchers were sending a powerful message, throwing big shapes, intending to instill fear and paralysis? They were not simply planning on marching any old place, they were on a mission — out to destroy peace of mind in a Jewish community.

Just as in Northern Ireland, both sides can invoke seemingly innocent and even noble values in ways which result in fine words not actually meaning what they seem to say. They may have — to borrow a phrase which the poet Seamus Heaney uses about the words of enmity — ‘the toothed efficiency of a mowing machine’.

If you have experienced the wounding power of symbols and of language you may not readily agree in adulthood with the sentiments of that reassuring refrain which is used by children and which goes: ‘Sticks and stones may break my bones but names will never hurt me’. Name-calling, words and even tunes, can and do hurt. They can hurt deeply, offend and inflame. Language is sometimes a signal by the aggressive that exclusion and persecution will be tolerated. It can chill dissent and inflict psychological torment.

Certainly, many legislatures have codes designed to criminalise conduct which steps over a threshold into incitement to hatred or violence. But these codes have often been accused of being inadequate.

I do not dispute the thesis that to embrace freedom of speech means having to listen to things which we do not like and things with which we profoundly disagree. What I do say is that the right of free speech can be enhanced. How? By ensuring that those who feel wounded by hateful expression have an effective means of being heard and of remedying any harm done to them by the barbs contained in those words.

The historical paralysis often experienced by victims of bigotry is no accident. As Rita Kirk Whillock, of the Southern Methodist University, has put it in an essay on hate as a stratagem for achieving political and social goals, ‘the use of hate as a rhetorical stratagem allows (the speaker) to accomplish four specific goals: to inflame the emotions, denigrate the designated outclass, inflict permanent and irreparable harm to the opposition, and ultimately, to conquer’.

The experience of women has often been one of having something to say but saying it to a brick wall in a society dominated by men. Recent research by Catharine MacKinnon and others on the subject of pornography undermines the contention that if
everyone is free to talk then everyone is equal and can simply counter opinions which they find offensive. Our defence of freedom of expression can only be enhanced in the end by our concern for the victims of its abuse.

Those of us who believe that words can hurt are seeking a balance. We do not wish a treasured human right to be hedged in by so many qualifications that the right itself becomes more theoretical than actual.

For this reason, we must seek ways of advancing the debate which will not reverse victories achieved in the course of a long international struggle for civil and human rights.

Positive action rather than censorship is the best way of fighting abuses of free speech, although some censorship or criminalisation of hatred cannot be ruled out. For if our constitutions and our treatises on human rights acknowledge the equality of each human being, then why should legal systems be seen to be neutral when children are called ‘dirty gippos’, or when religious difference becomes religious hatred?

There is some evidence that in those areas in Northern Ireland where dialogue forums have been set up across the cultural divide people are moving painfully up a mutual learning curve and are beginning to deal with deep-rooted mistrusts and hatreds.

There are those voices who would outlaw parades of all shades altogether. It is sometimes tempting to regard censorship as a short cut to creating the perfect society. Indeed, it is clear that the right of free speech is not absolute even within the United States. In this country obscenity is prohibited and indecency circumscribed. There are remedies for libel and sexual harassment. Also, ‘fighting words’ which are likely to make the person to whom they are addressed commit an act of violence are inhibited.

For its part, the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights reminds us that the freedom of expression is balanced by other obligations. It states that: ‘Everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible’ and that everyone may be subject to limitations which secure what the Declaration describes as ‘due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others and the just requirements of morality, public order and the general welfare in a democratic society’ (Article 29).

The question ultimately is not if it is wise to limit freedom of expression in certain circumstances — for such limitation in principle is widely acceptable. Rather we may ask if there are means of enhancing freedom of expression so that potential victims of speech and imagery are protected and given a remedy even if that remedy is simply a credible and meaningful opportunity to talk back.

There are at least three particular ways in which the right of freedom of expression may be enhanced by the protection of the vulnerable and by a raising of awareness as to why the broadest freedom of expression is desirable. Education, from the earliest years, in both equality and free speech and in the avoidance of its abuse; support for research into the impact of words and images; the creation of accessible and dedicated public talk-back forums or mediation mechanisms.

In recent years, schools have made real efforts to promote cross-community understanding. The new political climate demands that those efforts be redoubled and
extended beyond the schools. We coherently have to shift gear from a culture of conflict to a culture of consensus.

Education has a very important role to play too in helping people to discover new and imaginative ways of expressing cultural identity, ways more consonant with a culture of consensus, ways which can showcase a culture at its best.

The need for public talk-back venues is, it seems to me, the most important issue to raise here. By those I mean places of communication or protest for those who feel marginalised or oppressed by the exercise of free speech by others. So often each side feels that it alone is the victim, it alone is being martyred. By freeing these voices we enhance and advance freedom of speech, vindicating the rights of all, provoking dialogue and, ultimately, better informing public opinion.

The feeling of being put upon by others in the exercise of their free speech requires a very serious and profound response from all those committed to freedom of speech.

It is by such creative and constructive initiatives that I choose to assert the rights of victims of freedom of expression. By recognizing too the relevance of social inequality to this debate we lose nothing.

Those of us who advocate tolerance for free speech can hope to find common ground with those who are principally concerned about the effects of such speech on the vulnerable and the oppressed.

Freedom of expression is a precious human right. We are called to defend it not only against those who would suppress free speech but also against those who have made of that freedom a licence. They use it as a weapon to exploit, hurt or oppress their fellow and sister citizens. They do it cynically, and they do it deliberately. That is the price we pay for that freedom; it is a high price for those who feel the brunt of that weapon's poison and hatred. By all means let us say to the hard of heart — you are free to speak, but you will never have the last word.