

voted against her while many women in the Liberal Party had voted for her. She soon left the party.

Appropriately, as the last essay in the collection, Adam Shoemaker's article points to the integrity of Oodgeroo's career by explaining it as "a performative one in the Aboriginal tradition," an interpretation which incorporates the writing, educational and political streams of her life. Shoemaker takes as his prime example the *Rainbow Serpent* performance at the Brisbane Expo in 1988. Oodgeroo co-wrote *The Rainbow Serpent* with her son Kabul, but had to weather a great deal of criticism. She pressed ahead with her involvement in the face of the hostility of many in the black movement towards any collaboration in a bicentennial celebration. For her the key issues were overcoming racism and educating white Australians about Aboriginal culture. Here was an opportunity in the middle of a white festival with an audience estimated at 3 million not only to promote Aboriginal culture but also to critique western values. The *Rainbow Serpent* performance asserted Aboriginal sovereignty and promoted ecological values in the very heart of the Australian pavilion.

I put down these books with a sense of sadness that I never met this woman. I had grown up in the same part of the world, visited her beloved island often, participated in the same social movements unaware that she had played such a significant role in

establishing them in the 1960s. She had been at the centre of so many important political struggles and yet been loved by all. These accounts of her life and work are fitting tributes. No doubt there are many more yet to be written.

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Paul Turnbull

A WORLD TOO FEW IMAGINE

Pat Keating, *Worlds Apart: Life on an Aboriginal Mission Station*, Sydney: Hale and Iremonger, 1994, ISBN 0 86806 516 1.

Every-year the Christmas small-talk at our family gatherings turns to Aboriginal people. This is predictable, given that I am interested in the shared histories of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in Australia, and that my sister and her partner have worked for nearly a decade as health professionals with the Yonngu communities of eastern Arnhem Land. My parents have stayed with them, met their adoptive Yonngu families, and a couple of years ago returned from a tour across the Northern Territory mightily impressed by Aboriginal tourism.

Yet before long, these Christmas conversations take a familiar, dismal track. Aboriginal peoples in Northern

Australia — “full-bloods” — are contrasted by older relatives with the “half-caste” Aboriginal families living scattered across local suburbs. “These people are not real Aborigines,” someone will pronounce, and the tragedy is seen to be that these are the people who run Queensland’s Aboriginal organisations, squander unspecified but huge amounts of public money, and of course make us all feel guilty for what might have happened in the past.

My family would be shocked and hurt to be called racist. But through all our discussions over the years it has proved near impossible to discuss the differences of wealth and power, success and failure, between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in terms other than the easy but dangerous ones of racial inheritance. In their eyes, urban Aboriginal people “fall into poverty,” become chronically unemployed, or “turn to crime” because they have lost the inherent (genetic) strengths of “full-blood” tribal life.

Last Christmas was particularly trying. An aged pensioner and war veteran living in a neighbouring suburb had died from a fall after a scuffle, allegedly with several children who were breaking into his house. What had particularly incensed several of my relatives — some of whom are younger than my sister and I — was the *Courier Mail’s* failure to draw attention to the fact the accused were Aboriginal. Somehow this was another instance of favouritism being

extended to Aboriginal people. I remained silent, even though I was bursting to reply that by the same logic the press should be applauded for running headlines such as “Pommy Shop Stewards Strike Again,” or “Geordie Tyre-Slasher Still at Large in Inala.” My sister, a vegetarian, volunteered to slip upstairs to see how the turkey was progressing.

Scenes such as this made it impossible for my sister and I not to feel strong empathy with Pat Keating’s recollections, in *Worlds Apart*, of Christmas holidays and stunted family conversations, where it quickly became clear that she and her husband Neil’s involvement with Aboriginal people was also a source of irritation, if not fear. They seemed so very familiar. However, what made *Worlds Apart* the most influential book I read in 1994 was Pat Keating’s acute portrayal of the world she and her family entered when her school-teacher husband, Neil was posted by the New South Wales Education Department to an Aboriginal Mission settlement at a place she calls “Yarrowina” in the early 1960s. Several copies of this book have already gone as belated presents to parents and relatives, with the hope that Pat Keating’s remembrances of the world of black and white in all its richness, complexity and contradictions, will make future Christmas conversations longer and perhaps a little wiser.

In writing of this book I use the word “world” advisedly. Certainly, the title

Worlds Apart serves to emphasise the differences between living black and white in rural New South Wales during the early 1960s. As it stands, the title also reflects Pat Keating's hopes that we non-Aboriginal people of younger generations will remain mindful of the nature and extent of white indifference to the fate of Aboriginal people during the assimilationist era. Indeed, some of the most vivid and distressing sections of *Worlds Apart* are those in which the author recalls how members of the Mission community were treated by the Welfare Board staff, police and health professionals. This was a world where to be black and determined to have basic rights could lose you everything — your children, your partner, and the roof over your head.

However, many non-Aboriginal readers will find most disturbing the author's recollections of times when she and her children inadvertently crossed over into the world of living black. She tells of how, shortly after her arrival at the mission, she took her baby Megan to the local doctor with a rash, only to find herself being offered vitamin C tablets and shooed impatiently out of the surgery with the advice, "Go on, my dear, you'll be given something to fix the rash. It's all right. It won't cost anything." Since she gave the mission station as her address, the doctor simply assumed she was Aboriginal. Some months later young Christopher, the Keatings' fourth child, accidentally drank half a bottle of kerosene. In the rush to get the unconscious child to hospital he

came to be admitted by the mission manager, and when Pat Keating arrived shortly afterwards she was told he was out of danger but she could not see him as he needed complete rest. The next day she rang the hospital only to be told that Christopher was doing well but that "my visit would serve no purpose and would most likely disturb the child unnecessarily."

Then it started: a daily farce of ringing up and being fobbed off with the same vague reassurances and the same embargo on visits. We were now convinced that some dire complication had set in and on the fifth day when the same dispassionate voice relayed the same vague message, I exploded.

Eventually getting through to the hospital matron, Pat Keating got the same bland and patronising assurances, before the phone was abruptly put down on her. Then a call to the doctor treating Christopher revealed the reason for the child's lengthy isolation and the bland reassurances: the child had come to the hospital in the arms of the mission manager, and so it had been assumed that he was Aboriginal. When Neil Keating arrived at the hospital shortly afterwards to take his son home, only to meet with further resistance from the nursing staff, his voice raised in anger led young Christopher to appear in the corridor, ... "a forlorn little figure in a singlet and nappy, wide-eyed and apprehensive."

Pat Keating tells us that it took years for Christopher to overcome fully the affects of his separation, and it left her and Neil painfully aware that such traumas were the common experience of many Aboriginal children.

While vividly recalling how Aboriginal people living in the "Yarrowina" district were treated, Pat Keating rarely fails to do so without leaving the reader aware of the complexity of relations between black and white. Doctors, nursing staff and police were perfunctory and patronising in their dealings with Aboriginal people. But as the author is quick to stress, they were sincere people who saw themselves as making the best of meagre resources. If they failed it was in their incapacity or unwillingness to question the racist assumptions of the time. Aboriginal people would often tailor their behaviour to prejudice, in order to subvert and overcome its worse effects.

Worlds Apart reveals how common racial assumptions in post-war rural Australia were in fact challenged by black and white. For as the Keatings soon learnt, the local township had "two faces":

At first we thought it a totally cold and heartless town with the Aborigines pushed to the outskirts, harassed by authority and despised by most of the white inhabitants. But we were to learn of the ones who were without prejudice, those who mixed as

comfortably with the black half of the community as they did with their colleagues, whether from the hospital, the school, the shops or the local stations ...

Of course, being white gave the Keatings privilege and power in their negotiations with Aboriginal people. However, living in the ramshackle school-teacher's house on the mission station, Pat, Neil and their five young children soon found themselves with relationships, obligations and friendships, some of which remain strong to this day. It was a world of material poverty and often arbitrary use of power. But even so, issues of race, identity and power were never clear cut, as we learn from the author's recollections of her day-to-day relations with the mission superintendent, an Aboriginal man of strong evangelical faith, and his European wife.

The mission lay at the heart of a world few whites imagined to be rich in spirit. The Aboriginal people were determined to maintain their culture and identity. The Keatings, willing to accept their Aboriginal neighbours as equals, soon found themselves at the centre of this world, as persons trusted to use what authority they could command on behalf of the community. It was never an easy position, as several incidents recounted in the book make painfully clear.

Worlds Apart is an important and beautifully written contribution to our

understanding of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples' shared histories. It offers much that will be of interest to specialists in the field of Aboriginal studies, but it merits a wider audience than specialists alone. People involved in reconciliation groups should seriously consider reading and discussing *Worlds Apart* together with Ruby Langford Ginibi's *My Bundjalung People* and Evelyn Crawford's *Over my Tracks*.

Hale and Iremonger have produced a volume of high quality. They deserve especially to be commended for going to the expense of issuing *Worlds Apart* as a paper-back in an attractive colour dust-jacket designed by Megan Smith. It hides a cover that one can only assume was designed by someone who had not read the book. The cover uses the photograph of an unnamed Aboriginal woman dressed as a bridesmaid or possibly a debutante. Given that this work speaks so eloquently of the determination of Aboriginal people to freely control their own identity, why did the publishers not use a photograph which more accurately represents the fact that, in spite of all they weathered as the hands of white officialdom, the Aboriginal people of the mission were not mute victims? Similarly, stressing the material poverty of the mission, the publisher's copy on the back cover describes *Worlds Apart* as a "shameful and shocking indictment" of "Australia's version of apartheid." Yes, there was poverty and neglect. However, as *Worlds Apart* attests, there were also

Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people determined to create a just future.

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Christopher Lee

TRAVELLING THROUGH HISTORY

Maurice French, ed., *Travellers in a Landscape: Visitors' Impressions of the Darling Downs 1827-1954*. Toowoomba: University of Southern Queensland Press, 1994. Illustrated. 314 pp.

Maurice French's selection of travellers' impressions of the Darling Downs from 1827 to 1954 is an entertaining and timely contribution to the important but much neglected field of regional studies.¹ A large, handsomely illustrated, lucidly annotated work, *Travellers in a Landscape* is obviously intended for the coffee-table market. For this it is well suited: the selections are brief, accessibly formatted for the browser, and bound so that the book easily lays open regardless of the page position within the volume. To treat this collection as no more than a diversion, however, would be a singular injustice to the scholarship of its editor. *Travellers in a Landscape*, like all good collections, selects and arranges its material so as to advance an argument about the historical "development" of the Darling Downs region in Southern Queensland. At