

certainly did not equate to "feminine." As Dixon half-acknowledges (3) but then seems to forget, "manly" was a contraction of "gentlemanly" and connoted a sense of chivalry and self-denial rather than one of testosterone-marinated id. One may still want to argue that the Victorian neo-chivalric code was a self-deceiving repression, but the argument needs to be made, not just elided in an ahistorical way.

*Writing the Colonial Adventure* is a pioneering book which demonstrates how forgotten romance texts can be acutely interrogated and imaginatively re-narrated from the perspective of a century later. It is a subtle argument, always interesting, and astonishingly successful at threading quite diverse texts onto its analytical chain. The reader, however, may just occasionally wonder whether we are reading back to the historical culture of 1875–1914 or forwards to a new discursive Lemuria charmed into existence by the argument itself, and whether the rich harvest of "anxieties" may be less those of 1880s imperialism than those of 1990s academicism.

Kathy Anderson

## (TOO MANY) FAMILIAR VOICES

Irene Moores, ed. *Voices of Aboriginal Australia: Past, Present Future*. Butterfly Books, Springwood, NSW, 1995. 491pp. ISBN 0 947333 69 X

*Voices of Aboriginal Australia: Past, Present Future* makes an important contribution to the discussion of Aboriginal affairs. Compiled by Irene Moores for and with the assistance of the Aboriginal Deaths in Custody Watch Committee, it provides a forum for voices on such key interrelated concerns as Aboriginal history, Aboriginal deaths in custody, sovereignty, land rights and reconciliation. The collection utilises a broad range of sources — many of which have previously been published — including extracts from histories, literary works, life stories as well as newsletters, articles from newspapers and journals, poetry, petitions, speeches, addresses and interviews. The voices are divided, somewhat arbitrarily, into three sections: Past, Present, and Future.

Aboriginal voices are introduced with a foreword about the validity of Aboriginal English as a distinct language. A key motif in the collection is the spoken Aboriginal voice, and Moores refers to the fact that the voices in the collection "have all spoken and echoed together within living memory" (xvi). A number of

the stories reproduced here are taken from Deborah Bird Rose's *Hidden Histories*, a collection of transcribed Aboriginal histories gathered from people living and working mainly on cattle stations in the Victoria River district of the Northern Territory. As in *Hidden Histories*, the voices in Moores' collection speak the past from the present, through speakers connected to the past, rather than detached from it. Thus the closure evident in realist narratives is avoided, and a politicised historical discourse emerges. Moores emphasises the political implications of the past when she comments that a "new, hopeful future for Australian indigenous peoples can only be constructed on the basis of a thorough understanding of how the legacies of the past determine the limits of what is possible now and hence the prospects for future improvement" (xvii).

Provided it is not reinscribed by framing discourses the spoken voice can offer a way of avoiding the "grand narratives" of History, but there are times in *Voices* when the selection process itself is at risk of becoming a framing voice. While Moores avoids the role of the interpreting narrator, and in fact seems reluctant to include herself in the text at all (perhaps because she is not herself Aboriginal), she nevertheless exerts a controlling influence in the construction of the "Aboriginal Voices" in this text. Some introductory comments about her position, and about the production of Aboriginalities past and present, would therefore have been instructive.

The *Present* Aboriginal voices in this collection speak most often about Aboriginal Deaths in Custody: there are eleven entries on the general topic, and a further seven on juvenile justice and other legal/custodial issues. Gary Foley perhaps explains this emphasis when he presents police brutality as the catalyst for Aboriginal activism. Foley describes the injustices which led to the formation of Redfern's Aboriginal Legal Centre, the first Aboriginal community organisation which in turn led to "the birth of the modern Aboriginal political movement" (272). Many of the entries on police/custodial injustice express a sense of disillusionment with the Royal Commission into Deaths in Custody, specifically with the fact that its recommendations have not been implemented.

While the focus of these entries is on the injustice and brutality of the law — and Moores is careful not to perpetuate stereotypes of "criminal" or "anti-social" behaviour within the Aboriginal community — some discussion of crime within the Aboriginal community would nevertheless seem appropriate here. While misdemeanours and wrongful arrests are a significant element of the depiction of Aboriginal "criminality," some analysis of violent crime and its victims is also called for. While Letty Scott's interview alludes to domestic violence — her husband was initially charged after slapping her outside a bar — the issue is not really explored in the collection.

Other key themes of the *Present* section, carried over into the *Future* are Mabo and land rights, sovereignty and reconciliation. While these matters have already been explored, in some depth, notably in Kevin Gilbert's *Aboriginal Sovereignty* (which this collection cites extensively) they need wider circulation. They are crucial to the socio-political future of Australia. Discussions of sovereignty have often been overshadowed by the prominence given to the Council of Reconciliation — which was the dominant voice in the International Year for the World's Indigenous People: this collection goes some way to rectifying that imbalance. The Aboriginal Provisional Government is well represented by Michael Mansell's article and a long entry from the Aboriginal Provisional Government Papers. Although the government line on reconciliation is represented — the text of Paul Keating's Redfern speech is here — the majority of the voices suspect the reconciliatory process. Many of the voices compare the Council for Reconciliation to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, as an expenditure related more to public relations than to improving the political position of Aboriginal people.

Three of the entries on these issues — The Barunga Statement and articles by Michael Mansell and Paul Behrendt — have been published in *The Mudrooroo/Müller Project, A Theatrical Casebook*, a project situated within current debate on Aboriginal and Australian identity. *The*

*Mudrooroo/Müller Project* deals with issues of sovereignty and republicanism from a contrary stance to the voice of Aboriginal Reconciliation. Like *Hidden Histories* — a text included in the *Past* section here — the Michael Mansell Project raises issues of meaning-making which Moores does not address. Given the way her written sources range from Gilbert's realist-documentary style to the postmodernist *The Mudrooroo/Müller Project*, some discussion of the production of meaning would have been appropriate in the introduction.

Moore's failure to do so generates concerns about the collection's focus or intention. In her introductory remarks, Moores states that a major theme of the collection is the need for non-Aboriginal people to learn about Aboriginal culture and issues. However, she fails to address the idea of different notions of education. Should Aboriginal education, as she suggests, target a non-Aboriginal audience or, as some of the speakers argue, should it focus on re-education of Aboriginal people by Aboriginal people to foster an Aboriginal nation? Moores introduces the collection with an address by Linda Burney, the President of the Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Incorporated, and she contends that Burney's address, along with Oodgeroo's poetry and the message from Wadjularbinna, a Ganggalida spokesperson, expresses the educational theme of the book: "when the white Australian goes down that street and learns from, and accepts, the Australian Aboriginal,

then there will be harmony in a new partnership and we will all live together" (xvii). This tone is not always maintained in later sections. Moores notes that a few non-Aboriginal voices have been included in the collection, suggestions that "such learning is indeed happening" (xvii). Oodgeroo's poetry is said to express this educational theme, but her contribution to education — a focal concern of her later years — is not well represented.

In the *Future* section, especially, Moores links the notion of education to a more positive view of reconciliation. This section includes interviews with Wadjularbinna and Burnum Burnum conducted by Caroline Jones for the ABC, and interviews (conducted by Roderic Pitty, a member of the Aboriginal Deaths in Custody Watch Committee) with Arthur and Leila Murray, and Robert Bropho. The Jones interviews provide a more spiritual emphasis than is evident elsewhere, and the juxtaposition of Bropho's suspicions about the political validity of the Mabo decision with a press release by the Watch Committee after Bropho's arrest for non-payment of a fine, provides a powerful argument for change. The hope for change, for reconciliation, seems strong in the later entries, and the collection ends with Oodgeroo's "A Song of Hope."

Moores' conception of the relations between education and reconciliation can be inferred from her selections of poetry. The poems rely on simplicity,

directness and accessibility to convey their message; poets such as Lionel Fogarty and Mudrooroo, whose work makes fewer concessions to non-Aboriginal readers, were excluded (or perhaps they declined to appear). Of the twenty-seven poems included, twenty-three are by K.J. Reed-Gilbert, Kevin Gilbert, and Oodgeroo Noonuccal. Moores' sense of Aboriginal poets as representatives or spokespersons — a conceptualisation prominent since the publication of Oodgeroo's *We Are Going* in the early 1960s — is evident in her comment that:

The various contributions to this struggle represented in this collection have been joined together with some of the many moving poems which best express the Aboriginal spirit of resistance and recovery. The success of contemporary Aboriginal poetry is a tribute to the ability of Australia's original peoples to tell their story directly, without wasted words.

Placing photographic images of Aboriginal activism alongside many of the poems emphasises their socio-documentary impact, and affirms their status as records of Aboriginal political activity. Of course, this model of what Aboriginal poetry is — a direct address which expresses the spirit of resistance and recovery — excludes others. Poets such as Bobbi Sykes and Aileen Corpus, for example, have rejected the conventional forms favoured by this collection in favour of experimentation with the spoken word.

Quite apart from the limitations of its conceptualisation of Aboriginal poetry, reliance on so few poets seriously restricts the compiler's choice. Consequently, given their commitment to integration Oodgeroo's poems at times seem a strange choice. The fact that they were written when the Aboriginal movement was part of the civil rights movement does not always make them the best choice for the *Present* and *Future* sections. Given the strength of Aboriginal prison-poetry, poets such as Stephen Clayton, Robert Walker, and Robert Dixon could have added much to the discussion of police and custodial injustice.

Although *Voices of Aboriginal Australia* does provide a valuable forum for Aboriginal voices, it is a text in an increasingly familiar genre, and as more and more collections of Aboriginal voices are published, new ones need to offer a focus not provided elsewhere, and that has not been done here. Despite the apparent range of its source material, it does not really reflect diversity of Aboriginal voices. Seventeen of the ninety-eight entries were written or spoken by Kevin Gilbert. Moores' focus on accounts of oppression and resistance leads her to omit stories like those collected in Liz Thompson's *Aboriginal Voices: Contemporary Aboriginal Artists, Writers and Performers*, Wayne Coolwell's *My Kind of People*, or Roberta Sykes' *Murawina: Australian Women of High Achievement*. These collections challenge the familiar notions of Aboriginality and

explore new and different concepts of Aboriginal success. The *Past* section, in particular, might have acknowledged in its selections that the overwhelming majority of published Aboriginal life stories come from women. While issues such as sovereignty, land rights, and reconciliation are unquestionably important, Aboriginal voices have been raised on other issues, and the production of "Aboriginal voices" should not be limited to a narrow range of "Aboriginal issues." Lisa Bellear, Eva Johnson, Aileen Corpus, Jackie Huggans, Bobbi Sykes — "Aboriginal" voices which have raised such issues as sexuality and gender — could greatly have expanded the range of the voices in this collection.

Obviously, no single anthology can be comprehensive, and this one does not claim to be — but the title itself does set up an expectation of broad coverage. The inclusion of younger generation speakers and a more diverse range of topics, would not only have eliminated some of the repetition evident here, it would have helped to reassure this reader about the value of a text which consists almost entirely of already published work.

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