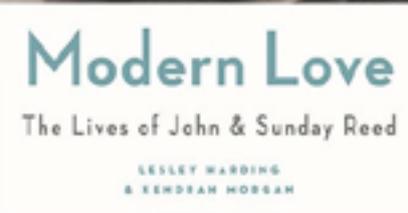
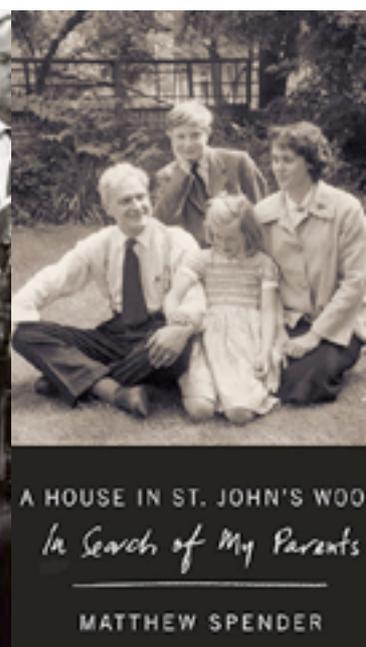
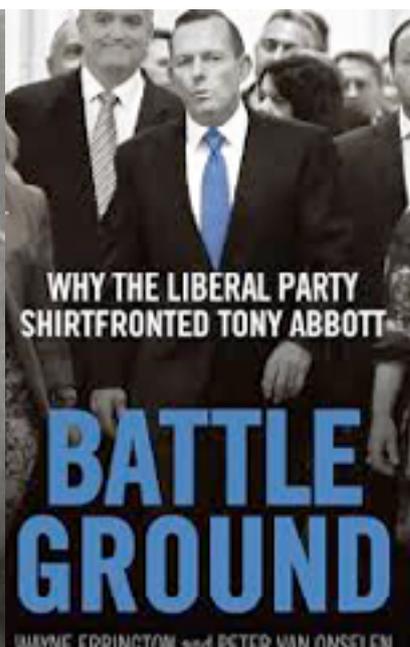
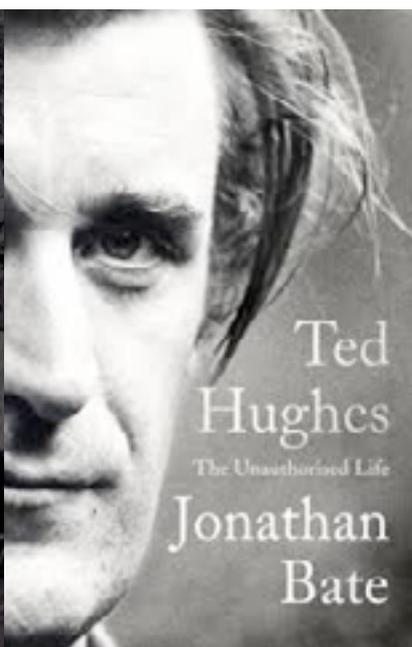
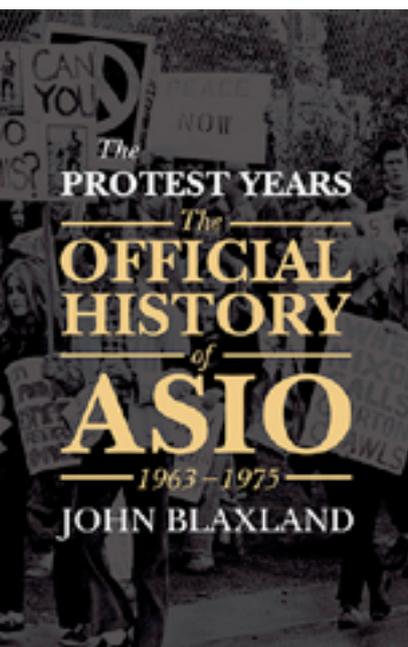




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AUSTRALIA'S ART LOVE NEST

Modern Love: The Lives of John & Sunday Reed

By Lesley Harding and Kendrah Morgan

The Miegunyah Press, An imprint of Melbourne University Publishing 2015

ISBN10 0522862810

ISBN13 9780522862812

RRP – \$45

Reviewed by Ross Fitzgerald

John and Sunday Reed are arguably Australia's most famous art patrons and a saucy and deeply unusual couple they were too. Part of their patronage involved free love and they didn't mind the occasional ménage à trois either. Yet despite their Bohemian tendencies, the Reeds hailed from establishment families in Hobart and Melbourne.

The artists who benefitted from their patronage include some of the greats of Australian art - Sidney Nolan, Sam Atyeo, Albert Tucker, John Perceval, Arthur Boyd, Charles Blackman and Noel Counihan. But as *Modern Love* explains and elucidates, some of these artists were at the same time emotionally, if not artistically, damaged by their relationship with the Reeds.

In 1943, John Reed and the editor of the Adelaide-based avant-garde magazine *Angry Penguins*, Max Harris, joined forces in the publishing firm Reed & Harris. However John was able to distance himself from the latter's misfortune when, a year later, the Ern Malley poems that Harris published were revealed to be an elaborate hoax concocted by two anti-modernist Sydney poets, James McAuley and Harold Stewart. Eventually John Reed and Max Harris fell out.

John and Sunday Reed were also particularly close to the talented Australian poet and editor Barrett ('Barrie') Reid - with whom their relationship was relatively unproblematic and which lasted right up until the final days of both of the Reeds.

Of fragile and delicate disposition and prone to nervous breakdowns, Sunday, who in the early 1930s studied art under George Bell in his Bourke Street Studio School in Melbourne, was a member of the rich and powerful Baillieu dynasty. In contrast, John, who worked as a solicitor in Collins Street in Melbourne's CBD,

was much more emotionally stable. But like his mercurial wife, John Reed was a great supporter and patron of the arts and of modernist painting in particular.

In 1934, John and Sunday (who had married on 13 January 1932) purchased a semi-rural property on the outskirts of Melbourne. They dubbed their new home, which came to boast a fine garden, 'Heide' - an abbreviation of Heidelberg. As Lesley Harding and Kendrah Morgan point out in their helpful preface to *Modern Love*, the Reeds "could have hardly imagined that eighty years later 'Heide' would be the site of a renowned art museum and widely regarded as the birthplace of Australian modernism".

A key to understanding the Reeds' highly volatile open marriage and also Sunday's desperate need to adopt a child is to be found in her unhappy first marriage to an Irish-American. Much to her parents' concern, for three years from 31 December 1926 she remained married to Leonard Quinn - who was also a Roman Catholic, which was a decided negative, especially to her father!

A serial philanderer, Quinn gave Sunday gonorrhoea, which necessitated her having a hysterectomy. Tragically, Sunday was pregnant at the time and the baby was aborted. All of this meant that she couldn't have any of her own children.

The process of constructing this compelling narrative was, the authors explain, "akin to putting together an immense jigsaw" - after which a detailed picture of the Reeds slowly emerged.

In their beautifully illustrated book, Harding and Morgan are mindful that those who knew John and Sunday Reed may find that their account "will bring to the surface memories both good and bad". This especially applies to sometimes harrowing details about the Reeds' own tangled relationships and in particular the interactions with their adopted son Sweeney (1944-1979) who was actually the child of artist Joy Hester, diagnosed with Hodgkin's Lymphoma shortly after Sweeney's birth. Moreover, it later emerged that Albert Tucker, who married Hester in 1941, was not Sweeney's biological father. In 1960, when Sweeney was only fifteen, Hester died of a cancer that had seemed to be in remission.

Despite the sometimes lurid descriptions, especially of interpersonal relations, in *Modern Love* the authors hope that this joint biography (in both senses of the word) will "extend the understanding of the Reeds as individuals - with all their

strengths and shortcomings – and as historical entities.”

In the main, *Modern Love* succeeds in this task - in that, after reading this challenging book, most readers will surely be left with an appreciation of John and Sunday's determination in promoting their modernist artistic vision and their own often convoluted and sometimes destructive sexual and personal lives. Indeed, what clearly emerges, at least to this reviewer, is the Reeds' powerful, if often idiosyncratic, devotion to each other characterised by what Harding and Morgan describe as “five decades marked by love, loss, achievement, estrangement and heartbreak”.

Yet not all that the authors know has been put to paper and published. Hence Harding and Morgan, rather tantalisingly, write that: “In some instances we found the truth was stranger than fiction, and decided to withhold some particularly sensitive material out of respect for those still living.”

What a shame that, 82 years after establishing Heide, we are still not being told what the authors regard as the full and unvarnished story of John and Sunday Reed and of all the Australian artists who formed such a pivotal role in their lives.

One of the great strengths of *Modern Love* is the vast array of characters who crisscross the lives, not just of the Reeds themselves, but also of those who visited Heide. These include future erratic Labor leader Dr HV Evatt and his hugely talented wife Alice. Indeed, when Evatt became Minister for External Affairs he took with him, as an untrained aide and personal adviser, Sam Atyeo - whose controversial utterances and antics well and truly got up the noses of other diplomats, both Australian and otherwise. This was until Liberal Party heavyweight, Robert Gordon Menzies, on becoming prime minister, promptly dispensed with Atyeo's “services”.

Yet, as much as they admired Sam Atyeo, John and Sunday - who had spent time in Paris with young Sweeney - seem to have been envious of the fact that Atyeo had been able not just to meet, but to continue to mix with, famous identities of the Parisian and wider European art world.

Sometimes sexual freedom at Heide took its toll. By the end of 1941 and before Sidney Nolan left, ostensibly to fight in World War II, his relationship with Sunday Reed had developed into much more than a passionate physical attachment.

As the authors explain, “There was no doubt in the minds of those close to them that the pair had fallen deeply in love and that John’s role in the ménage was threatened.”

Despite the fact that he had resumed an affair with artist Moya Dyring, John Reed found the Nolan complication to his unorthodox marriage deeply upsetting. The situation became even more complicated when Sunday was utterly devastated by Nolan’s departure. Predictably though, the artist of Ned Kelly fame did not remain long as a member of the armed forces of Australia.

Eventually, on 25 March 1948 at St Stephen’s Presbyterian Church, Sydney Nolan married John Reed’s sister Cynthia. Their marriage resulted in an estrangement from Heide and the Reeds. John Reed came to regard the loss of Nolan from their lives as one of what he termed a “litany of defeats”.

In the autumn of 1967, John and Sunday moved into a revamped house, which they named “Heide 11” - to distinguish the new dwelling from “Old Heidi”. But things became extremely painful when, in 1971, Nolan published *Paradise Garden*, an intensely personal account of his tumultuous life with the Reeds in the 1940s. John and Sunday Reed found this extremely hurtful.

In 1976, Cynthia Nolan committed suicide in London. Within three months of Cynthia’s death, Sidney Nolan moved in with Sunday’s close friend Mary Perceval, nee Boyd. Nine months later Sidney and Mary were married, In March 1979, Sweeney Reed, who was just 34, also suicided.

Even though she continued to work on her much-loved garden at Heide until shortly before her own demise, Sunday never recovered from Sweeney’s death. Three weeks after the opening of Heidi Park and Art Gallery, on 5 December 1981, the seemingly indefatigable John Reed, after a long battle with cancer, died. His final words to his wife were overheard to be: “Darling, you have made my life.”

Ten days later, stricken with grief, Sunday Reed took an overdose of sleeping pills and died on 15 December 1981. Only the extremely loyal Barrie Reid was with her. When her doctor visited the following morning, he allegedly remarked that she had died of a broken heart!

Fittingly, John and Sunday’s ashes were joined beneath a river red gum tree at

their beloved Heide.

Professor Fitzgerald, a columnist with The Australian, most recently co-authored the political/sexual satire Going Out Backwards : A Grafton Everest Adventure. Professor Fitzgerald is currently researching and co-authoring, A Dozen Soviet Spies Down Under?

A Little Bit Of England

A House in St John's Wood - In Search of My Parents

By Matthew Spender

William Collins 2015

ISBN: 9780008132064

ISBN 10: 0008132062

RRP - \$45 hb

Reviewed by Anne Henderson

It is a massive undertaking for a son or daughter to attempt to paint an objective portrait of his or her parents' lives, much less their relationship with each other or their children. Yet this is what Matthew Spender has achieved in his recently published *A House in St Johns Wood – In Search of My Parents*. Even to the extent of revealing much of his own personal history apart from his parents.

The Spender household gravitated around Stephen Spender (1909-1995), a well brought up and educated son of a father who died when he was 17 and for whom he held a life-time anger. Harold Spender was, for his son Stephen, a monumental failure symbolised by having lost as a Liberal candidate in a general election having used his young sons to campaign. Stephen's mother belonged to a successful Jewish family whose money gave the Spender children a place in upper middle class life, which they took for granted.

The Spenders' comfortable place in society is caught in snatches in Matthew Spender's account. At Oxford, with well connected friends like WS Auden, Stephen Spender went from gangly youth to confident poet as part of a "gang" of three made up of himself, Christopher Isherwood and Wysten Auden. Spender's growing insouciance is apparent when he failed to turn up for his finals. Another such casual reference is to Matthew Spender throwing up at Chatsworth House, as a child, when lunching with his father and the Duke and Duchess of Devonshire. Such cameos offer a world apart from the masses.

As Matthew Spender writes, half way through his book, his project is to write some of the secret history of the British establishment. He has, in this, joined a number of professional historians digging through letters and papers of twentieth century British public figures and artistic heroes to create biographies and TV

docudramas to the delight of a voyeuristic public, hungry for the saucy bed linen.

In *A House in St Johns Wood*, however, the secrets are revealed by a son who came to discover gradually that his father – the famous poet - was not only a high earning and much respected writer with contacts in the publishing world to die for, but also a relatively closet bi-sexual who continued his sexual liaisons across the globe with various men while living as a husband to his wife Natasha, mother of the Spender children.

As the story unfolds, Matthew Spender reveals his belief that, “Somewhere in my father’s persona there was a wild need to create a male partnership apparent to all the world.” To which the son responds, “That’s fine. It’s even noble. But it required the cooperation of Natasha, his wife. And he seems not to have given the slightest thought to how this would make her feel in public, at parties, at dinners, within the world.”

Natasha Litvin married Stephen Spender on 9 April 1941 at St Pancras Registry. It was Spender’s second marriage and his third serious heterosexual affair. They had been introduced by Stephen’s “working class” lover Tony Hyndman in August 1940.

Natasha was a young pianist at the Royal College of Music. She would go on to make a career as an accomplished pianist giving recitals in the UK and USA, albeit never making the A grade. Her mother Rachel Litvin was an actress of Estonian Jewish ancestry and her father was the well-known music critic Edwin Evans. Natasha was the illegitimate product of their extra-marital affair and, consequently, Natasha hardly knew her father since Rachel refused to allow Evans to divorce his wife in order to marry her.

Aided by well off friends, Rachel was able to foster her daughter out so that Natasha was raised among the Booths – the family of shipping magnate Charles Booth. As part of that growing up, Natasha developed an anxiety over her roots, seeking love and security throughout her life.

In time, Matthew Spender came to realise that his father’s close friend Wysten (WH) Auden had imaged his mother in a line as “the frowning schoolgirl [who] may be dying to be asked to stay”. He writes, “frowning yet longing for affection was a perfect description of her. The will to be loved was part of her conviction

that she would surely be rejected.” Natasha’s quest for love paralleled that of her husband Stephen, but in very different ways.

Matthew Spender came to realise that his parents were locked in an unbreakable bond – albeit one that disappointed both of them. Even the pursuit of Natasha by popular fiction and mystery writer Raymond Chandler in his last years, a pursuit that took her away from her husband for long periods to be with Chandler, did not loosen the Spender marital bonds. In time, the Natasha-Chandler relationship would peter out and leave NS in tears when she learnt of Chandler’s death belatedly and – as her son, watching, realised – “rage that she hadn’t been contacted by a lawyer to tell her that she’d inherited everything”.

Stephen Spender had very developed ideas about love but was himself quite confused about his own relationships. SS told Reynolds Price, for whom he had fallen around Christmas 1956, that he loved his wife but that the relationship was frustrated for fairly obvious reasons. He then described this as a case of him being “too ambivalent” and Natasha “too repressed”. In fact, Natasha’s repression had developed from forcibly hiding her natural feelings about her husband’s affairs or, as the psycho-analyst Anna Freud concluded, holding herself together by “an immense effort of will”.

Undoubtedly, the marriage had begun quite happily – two very tall people in love, with Natasha aware of her husband’s “ambiguous” past. Before they had married, during a fortnight together in Wittersham with the comfort of a heritage house complete with warm kitchen and workroom, they had laid out their stories frankly and felt united in their view of the future.

Natasha wrote later: “I look back on that brief holiday as a time of exceptional élan in the feeling that we had dropped our childhood like unwanted baggage”. For Natasha, it seemed SS had left his ambiguity behind. For SS, there was no such understanding and Natasha would later, and very abruptly, realise that there would always be “a dark area of their shared life that she would never reach”.

Natasha first discovered the truth in 1947, at a party in Paris. Asking who was the “elegant young man” Stephen was talking to across the room, the reply was, “Don’t you know? That’s Stephen’s new lover.” Natasha stood up and fainted - a day or so later she tried to jump out of a train as she and Stephen travelled to Italy.

In his reasoning about marriage, SS argued that he could never live with a man. Two males would know each other completely and leave no room for mystery. The only mystery possible with a male would be for SS to live with a “working class” man – for SS, class divided people into separate species. And his feeling about class was part of his instincts as if it were a gene. He could never understand that his son had no bias about class, on one occasion remarking how odd it was that MS could talk to a working class person in a pub as an equal – “Fancy that! Matthew can’t understand the meaning of Class War!”

But the working class theory had not proved sufficient with Tony Hyndman. So Natasha, and before her Inez Pearn, became Spender’s wives. Inez walked out soon enough but Natasha clung on. Children and a home made all the difference in her life. In time, as her son records, “she enjoyed being Lady Spender”. And she would defend till her death her husband’s loyalty to her – plastering over the cracks in a keeping-up-appearances crusade.

Living with a woman, then, was Stephen Spender’s answer to domesticity. Love affairs, on the other hand, were something else – a necessary part of the artistic experience. Or, as Matthew Spender sees it, the way to another poem. The idea of being in love was for SS an essential.

Ahead of his time, in the late 1920s Stephen Spender worked on various drafts of a coming of age novel (*The Temple*) that charted in fictional form his time with Auden and Isherwood enjoying the delights of young men in Germany. The novel would lie unpublished until discovered by a researcher in Spender’s papers in the 1980s. His adventures later with “various boys” in Hamburg added further inspiration. Soon after, he was dining out on stories of exploits with Isherwood in Berlin. He planned to locate himself part of the year in Berlin and part in London. Nazi Germany would change all such plans. By December 1936, Stephen Spender had married Inez Pearn in London.

At this point, Spender senior had become a confirmed anti-fascist and a great believer in communism as savior of the world. Sent to Spain by the UK Communist Party leader Henry Pollit, to trace the whereabouts of a Russian ship carrying munitions, SS showed how little he knew of espionage.

However, SS then joined the UK Communist Party only to return to Spain and be bitterly disappointed after discovering the party had little time for individual dilemmas and was as dictatorial as the fascists. In time, he would trace what Mat-

thew Spender writes of intellectuals like his father and US author Mary McCarthy “a similar trajectory of well meaning idealists led astray”. Spender contributed an essay in *The God That Failed* – published in 1949 as a collection by intellectuals who had been disillusioned by the communist lie.

In his work as a founder and editor of *Encounter* magazine, Stephen Spender would also be caught between supporting the Cold War campaign against communism and feeling at the same time that the US had usurped that campaign. It had long been Stephen Spender’s ambition to found or be part of the establishment of a quality liberal arts magazine. He had been part of the group that founded *Horizon* in the late 1940s. After the anti-communist Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF) was set up in 1949-50, SS helped found and became co-editor of the CCF magazine *Encounter*.

Backed by clandestine American money, SS chose not to delve too deeply into *Encounter*’s finances and positioned himself with its literary rather than political material. Years later, he would pay a price for his efforts when it became public that CIA money funded the CCF. Matthew Spender writes that the publicity “nearly destroyed” his father. He resigned as an editor there in 1966.

Stephen Spender was no Cold War warrior. He saw through the left-liberal charade but could only confront it in literary efforts. As with many of his artistic themes, his notions were sprung from an elite altruism and belief - the leanings of well educated, middle class liberals. His son sees through this early and recounts a time one summer when his parents left him holidaying with a rustic local family in Torri del Bonaco on the shores of Lake Garda. The family’s usual holiday digs was “an entire wing of the Albergo Gardesana” complete with a piano transported from Verona.

After some time with the peasant family, SS came to visit his son, for which the host family made every effort. Stephen told Matthew afterwards that, with such marvellous food, the family could only be money poor while culturally very rich. He was soon brought back to reality as his son pointed out that the day’s lunch was not the usual fare – mostly it was “polenta with mince-and-tomato sauce” and often just polenta.

Matthew Spender’s account of his parents and their world is that of a part player. He knew many of the characters in the story, albeit as a child and young man. He has his own reactions to events, and is a witness for much of their lives. Irving

Kristol, who had moved from far left to anti-communist right and co-founded *Encounter* with SS was sacked in 1957; it suited him, as Matthew Spender writes, since he was “fed up with the pusillanimous Brits and wanted to get back to New York”. Mel Lasky, who took his place, referred to Stephen Spender’s “wishy washy liberalism” and there were tensions.

Matthew Spender, as a youth had no ideological hangups and soon rejected the left view of life as dictatorial and misguided. But from his closeness to his father and Auden, he witnessed their insecurities about public attention.

Auden, propped up on the bedhead behind a young Matthew on one occasion, was “just sitting there doing absolutely nothing” and quite despondent. The rain outside reflected his mood. The phone rang. It was a call for Auden from the *Evening Standard*. “He was radiant over the telephone. ‘But I *like* the rain.’ He said. ‘I *love* British weather.’” From which MS concludes, “Wystan, I knew, was one of the ‘truly great’. Did he really need a phone call from the *Evening Standard* to cheer him up?

On another occasion, MS records how his father had written *Engaged in Writing*, lampooning the hypocrisies of the liberal left. Yet he can also see through his father in this – too weak to hurt he says at one point – and recognises the limitations of his father’s own commitments: “He wanted the working classes to be treated better than they had been, but beyond that, it would be hard to say what political aims he had in mind.” With the Suez crisis in 1956, Matthew Spender writes of his own concern and how it left him sticking pins on maps, but his father “looked instead mildly worried and anything but military.”

Matthew Spender, however, was also shut out. Like the children of so many talented or self-absorbed parents, he can recall many occasions as if being on the other side of a locked door.

In his chapter “Too Ambivalent”, Matthew Spender opens up about how it felt to grow in a family so divided by personal and public ambitions and emotions. He reveals how much his father had ached to “belong to the category of ‘truly great’” and how he neglected his wife in this pursuit. Equally, his mother was ambitious in her contest to be recognised for her recitals:

I saw that that they were equally ambitious people, and that their differences were

merely that of style. However, when it came to emotions, it was clear that my mother was neglected. Dad's attention lay elsewhere. He was an absent husband. If it came to that, he was an absent father. Behind his good manners there lay a detachment indistinguishable from boredom.

The Spender detachment from the emotional responses of others is a consistent theme in this story. In early 1946, playing go-between over a dispute between Stephen Spender and Cyril Curtius over Spender's use of Curtius' reflections on Nazi Germany, T S Eliot referred to Stephen Spender as "a really good and affectionate young man – though very callow for his years ... He is a Liberal, and therefore tends to intolerance and judging others; and he tends to take an unconsciously superior tone on the basis of very imperfect understanding."

This "detachment" might also have been responsible for Spender senior's casual attitude to one of Britain's most notorious double agents, Guy Burgess, especially after Burgess fled the UK for Moscow and lived there in exile unable to return to his comfortable and familiar London establishment. On a visit to Moscow in 1960, SS was hoping (naively) to set up a meeting with the Union of Soviet Writers at a time of Iron Curtain repression. He was met with the usual blocks.

While waiting for answers from authorities, the lonely Burgess phoned Stephen Spender. They had been known to each other back in London and one of Burgess' last phone calls on leaving the UK was made to Stephen Spender's home. Spender agreed to meet Burgess and took notes of the meeting. SS recalled that his predominant feeling was one of compassion and his notes are very revealing of Guy Burgess. But the act of agreeing to meet Burgess indicates that Spender had little understanding of the significance of what meeting Burgess could mean. He listened while Burgess glossed over his actions, argued that he had been a victim of the Americans, and even called SS an "American agent" a couple of times.

Novelist John Le Carre had a similar opportunity to meet another notorious exiled double agent - Kim Philby - in Moscow. Le Carre declined – in spite of the opportunity it might have given him as a writer of espionage novels. He declined out of recognition that such a meeting would boost Philby and help him justify his actions in sending so many to their deaths as a double agent while spying for the Soviets. Stephen Spender had no such sophistication.

Matthew Spender is remarkably honest about the complications he faced on this "search" for his parents. As a younger man and already partnered with Maro

Gorky, daughter of the Armenian artist Arshile Gorky, Matthew joked about one of his father's friends David Plante. This led to a confrontation where MS considered that his father might have over-reacted. His final conclusion is more revealing:

To make a joke of Plante's name was corny, perhaps even in bad taste, but surely no more than that. However, thinking it over, I decided that Dad's anger was justified. My casual remark was a form of rejection, not so much of David Plante himself as of this whole arcane world that my father valued, which I felt I couldn't enter.

And the solution - future silence - would make the divide between father and son even greater:

Over time, however, I discovered that keeping this vow was in itself a form of rejection. My silence was accusatory. The Creeping Plante episode, slight though it was, became a key moment when I began to cut myself off from my father.

A House in St Johns Wood – In Search of My Parents is a magnificent achievement. It takes the skins off the parent-child relationship layer by layer, in a succession of moments, all the while circling about the entanglements of personal relationships at a time of moral guardianship by the state against homosexuality.

Matthew Spender takes his mother's side often but never reduces his father's spirit. He records how, for his mother, "a great weight lifted from her mind" when in 1967 the laws against homosexuality were at last repealed. She had feared the scandal of her husband being accused in public. All the while, he had thrown caution to the wind.

At the same time, Natasha kept control. Whatever boys' adventure her husband played at, she was the keeper at the gate. But she could not prevent her son from his own account – and his readers are the beneficiaries of that.

Anne Henderson is deputy director of The Sydney Institute. Her most recent book, *Menzies at War*, was short listed for the 2015 Prime Minister's Literary Award for History.

A Haunted Life

Ted Hughes: The Unauthorised Life

By Jonathan Bate

HarperCollins 2015

ISBN: 9780008118228

RRP - \$49.99 hb

Reviewed by Anne Henderson

In the 2015 movie *A Walk in The Woods*, the character who is travel writer Bill Bryson says, “Books – they’re like TV for smart people.” So true. And only a book for smart people could reveal the depths of character or recreate authentically the life of former poet laureate, Yorkshire born Ted Hughes – as Jonathan Bate has achieved in his splendid *Ted Hughes: The Unauthorised Life*. It is big (566 pp), compelling and lush with complex and intimate details of a life lived to the full at the expense of both the subject and his immediate family and associates.

No movie or TV documentary could capture the immense hunger and tragedy, greed and voracity, along with the exuberance of characters, activity, language, myth and spirit that Ted Hughes’ life encompassed. As well, from the time of the suicide of his first wife, the poet and author Sylvia Plath, his was a life haunted by her presence.

In keeping with the controversial history of the Plath-Hughes partnership and Ted Hughes’ own life, Jonathan Bate’s biography has not been forthcoming without its own dramas. In her February 2016 piece for the *New York Review of Books*, author and Plath/Hughes scholar Janet Malcolm lambasts Bate for his clever, but willful, revelations of some of Hughes’ nastier characteristics. For Malcolm, this is all about Bate wanting to “cut Hughes down to size and does so, interestingly, by blowing him up into a kind of extra-large sex maniac”. Well maybe – or maybe Bate just wanted an honest account of the Hughes personality.

Previously unavailable archives from the Ted Hughes estate were sold to the British Library for £500,000 by Hughes’ widow Carol, and eventually opened to the public in 2010. There was also a large collection of manuscripts sold by Hughes to Emory University in Atlanta and a collection of selected letters available from 2007, which Bate describes as “revealing [Hughes] as perhaps the greatest English literary correspondent since John Keats”.

Having a fascination with Hughes from his youth (“I shall never forget the experience of hearing him read *Crow* at a little gallery in Cambridge when I was an undergraduate”), Bate made contact with Carol Hughes and was given the go-ahead to research and publish a literary biography of this famous (and somewhat infamous) English poet. There was, for some time, generous co-operation with the family – including Ted Hughes’ possessive sister Olwyn who had also been his literary agent and occasional publisher.

Bate initially spent four years of extensive research and requested another year from his publisher in order to finish the book. He read Hughes’ more than 100 books, the memoirs of friends and associates, the works of poets that referenced Hughes’ world, interviews and exchanges with those still alive who had known him and the extensive archives, and discovered much that those who had been closest to him had never known. Too much it seems for Carol Hughes who held the copyright - although not it seems for Ted’s sister Olwyn who had her own take on her brother’s life and had jealously viewed women such as Sylvia as intruders.

So often, the guardians of the archives belonging to their publicly known relatives or associates have bare knowledge of the detail to be found in them, the hidden away scribblings, the letters and the intimate moments such documents can chart. These minders have not taken the hours/months/years of time to read the contents as researchers will.

In Bate’s years spent reading the Hughes archives, he discovered that the distinguished poet was an insatiable diarist and recorder of his days. As Bate wrote in an article for *The Guardian* on 3 April 2014:

It wasn’t organised and systematic like Plath’s but, piecing together thousands of pages of memorandum books, loose leaves and pocket notebooks in the British Library, it became clear that this was an almost complete record of [Hughes’] inner life amounting to nearly a quarter of a million words. Fascinatingly, the journal and the Birthday Letters project proceeded in tandem through the years. Sometimes you can’t even be sure whether a piece of writing is a journal entry or the draft of a poem about Hughes’ life with Plath and its legacy.

In 2014, Bate’s extensive digging had somehow become known to Carol Hughes, who suddenly dropped her co-operation with the Bate biography. No reasons were given but, clearly, Bate was given to understand that he had strayed beyond the “literary” account to more of a “biographical” one in the drafts (most of which

the family had not read) of the Ted Hughes' story.

The result was a successful action by the "estate" which left Bate unable to publish large amounts of Hughes' writings. Bate would be limited to only brief quotations from Hughes' published works. Ironically, the resulting biography is all the better for it - far crisper for the average reader and certainly more riveting.

Bate has crafted into public knowledge a very public and private man, all done without the weight of the literary criticism expected if lines could have been lengthily quoted. Without the full use of the vastly poetic voice of Hughes, Bate has fashioned a literary sculpture of Hughes and his huge life experience by combining an appreciation of the poet/writer's works, his voluminous memoranda and the memoirs and memories of those who knew him. It is an intellectual pot-boiler like no other.

There is no doubt that the five years Bate spent absorbing Hughes has put him in touch with the soul of the famous poet and writer, alongside adventurous (even gluttonous and rough sex) womaniser, unfaithful and also loving husband, caring father, hobby farmer, aging fishing addict and friend of the Queen Mother and Prince of Wales – among other attributes. Bate's account is non-judgmental of any who appear. Even the "harridan" feminists who pursued Hughes over Sylvia Plath's suicide in the 1970s and 1980s can be seen to have a case.

Poet and novelist Sylvia Plath haunts the biography as she did the man.

Bate reveals that Hughes began his *Birthday Letters* shortly after Plath's suicide in February 1963. These writings would eventually become what Bate argues was an attempt at atonement, a secret writing down of Hughes' pain and regret, his moments of inspiration around his loved ones and the burden he carried from his appetite for freedom and unqualified desires.

In 1987, a legal case was taken by one of Plath's university colleagues, Jane Anderson against Avco Embassy Pictures, producers of a movie version of Plath's partially autobiographical *The Bell Jar*. Anderson believed she was the basis of the character Joan Gilling in *The Bell Jar* but had been misrepresented as a lesbian in the movie. The case took Hughes back to the streets of Boston where he and Sylvia had lived. Bate's book opens with a brief slice of these legal proceedings. The flood of memories made Hughes determined to turn his private writings on his rela-

tionship with Plath into a project for publication at some later stage – this would become his epic *Birthday Letters*, released not long before his death in 1998.

Bate works the Catherine/Heathcliff motif of *Wuthering Heights* strongly into the story of this Yorkshire moors poet and the New England mother of his children whom he once loved deeply and who became, for a time, his physical and spiritual mentor. No woman, Bate believes, ever reached Hughes' soul like Sylvia. Her memory hangs over his imagination like Scout Rock hung over Mytholmroyd, the small town of Hughes' boyhood.

And it was Sylvia, the upper middle class burgeoning poet and fresh spirit of the New World, who pushed the working class Hughes up the social ladder. Hughes was one of the bright young things that made it to the elite Oxbridge post-war world, studying at Cambridge where he met Plath. That Hughes knew Plath had a mentally unstable past and that Plath knew Hughes was what she called "very sadistic" did not stop their marriage. They tied the knot on 16 June 1956, in London. Ted was as smitten as he would ever be, writing of a morning after leaving Sylvia that he felt himself:

"floating/ On air spilling in over the city/Off the Surrey gardens and orchards". Then he heard "London's hidden blackbirds and thrushes". "a million singers", singing a blessing upon the "sleeping millions". It was like "a high tide at dawn, the top of the tide,/ Their dawn chorus awash through the whole city". Meanwhile his totemic birds, the crows, accompanied him at ground level.

As struggling post graduates, it was Sylvia who pushed Ted to enter a poetry competition, shortly after they married, which she had noted but was not ready for herself. Hughes won it and thereafter published his first book of poems – *The Hawk in The Rain*. Hughes wrote to his older brother in Australia soon after – "marriage is my medium".

Early love, however, was soon overtaken by domesticity. With the birth of two children – Frieda and Nicholas – Hughes' affairs would end the marriage. Sylvia produced her best writing in the latter part of this marriage breakdown – pouring out her angst and previewing the plight of educated women in the next few decades. Plath's confessional work of this time would later awaken Hughes as to what was needed to appeal to the modern reading public.

On the night of Plath's suicide, after she had phoned Hughes to seek a meeting, he was not with Assia Wevill, for whom he had left Sylvia, but yet another lover Susan Allison. The fact that Hughes had not answered Sylvia's call would nag him always.

Made into a TV movie, the life of Ted Hughes might be titled "Ted and Sylvia and Assia and Susan and Carol and Brenda and Jill and Jennifer and Emma and Many More Not Named – the Life of a Liberated and Socially Mobile Poet of the Late Twentieth Century". A few years after Sylvia's death, Hughes admitted to Brenda Hedden – one of three women he loved at the time ("A, B and C") "nicely spaced out" between London, North Tawton and Welcombe – that "he no longer wanted to be dependent on one woman; he felt it was weakening and suffocating him". A journal entry he made crisply summed up his mindset – "3 beautiful women – all in love, and a separate life of joy visible with each, all possessed – but own soul lost."

A poem Hughes drafted at this time began, "Which bed? Which bride? Which breast's comfort?" Before he eventually married Carol, seeking some home life stability, he asked Frieda and Nicholas which of Brenda and Carol he should choose – they opted for Carol. They married, almost secretly, on 19 August 1970 – Carol was 22 and Hughes had just turned 40. As he had done with his marriage to Sylvia, Hughes did not tell his family or friends he had married. But this time, he spent the following weeks bedding Brenda Hedden, as if he had made the wrong choice.

Hughes was a great poetic voice for England in the second half of the twentieth century and his work is a serious addition to the canon of English poetry, without doubt. Yet, he could never remove from his mind the personal memory of his life with Sylvia Plath. In time, he would add to that the suicide of his on and off partner Assia Weevil, who also gassed herself, killing their daughter Shura alongside her. Whether memorial or inspiration for his art, Hughes' writings would turn them into literature.

Without Plath, one wonders how far Hughes might have moved creatively. Plath's art is recognised for its modern confessional exposure found especially in her later writings - her ability to release her inner spirit in poetic genius. As a contained, domestic, yet creative individual she poured the inspiration this gave her into her work. The years of motherhood had taken over, leaving Plath saddled with a husband - tiring of the domestic - who regarded her as prime carer for their chil-

dren and had little understanding of her need for independence or support. This was not the partner she had married. Plath became the scream at the status quo, which had caught educated women in the post war years of the twentieth century. Plath got it – and wrote it.

Ted Hughes was a man of his time - those liberated decades for ordinary lives of sex and creative individualism. Sadly, this also means he will be remembered for his personal tragedies - a result of his self-serving lust for the women he craved and supposedly loved.

Increasingly, however, the artist and his/her personal life are hard to separate. Hughes was an assiduous scholar of classic literary modes – “I was exasperated by his huge book on Shakespeare, but I was delighted in his return to form with *Tales From Ovid*”, writes Bate. Hughes trawled issues of conservation with his earthy love of the English countryside and its creatures; he dabbled in legendary myths and mysticism. He was a saturated intellectual. And we are in his debt. He spoke for the Western world’s times. In this, however, he was also a narcissistic individual who left a trail of remorse.

We are certainly indebted to Jonathan Bates for such a well rounded portrait of this extraordinary man and his world.

Anne Henderson is Deputy Director of The Sydney Institute and author of *Menzies at War* - shortlisted for the 2015 Prime Minister’s Literary Awards for History

NEITHER WHORE NOR SUBMISSIVE

Breaking the Silence: French Women's Voices From the Ghetto

By Fadela Amara

University of California Press, 2006

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Reviewed by Ida Lichter

This small volume is packed with first-hand information on a threat that has the Western world on edge: sexist violence associated with immigrant communities.

Various pundits have offered views on this pressing issue but none more compelling than Fadela Amara's observations and personal experience as a child of poor Algerian immigrants in France, and later as an exemplary human rights defender.

The Evian accords of 1962 offered French citizenship for Algerians born in the colony prior to independence if they applied for naturalisation. Many first generation North African immigrants hoped to return to their home country but most remained and, by 1990, formed 39.1 per cent of the foreign population.

Amara's father had left his hometown of Aït Yusef, in 1955, looking for construction work in France. His wife, married at sixteen, and 22 years younger, bore six boys and four girls. They were a typical North African immigrant family, in which the father was provider and patriarch. Among the children, seniority and gender determined the social structure. While sisters were assigned housework, the oldest brother had all the privileges. As a second-generation immigrant born in 1964, Amara recalled growing up in an environment of latent anti-Arab discrimination, yet proud of French republican values.

The family lived in Herbet, a housing project in Clermont-Ferrand, a district of the Auvergne. Previously a shantytown, the estate provided low-cost housing for 150 families, predominantly Algerian immigrants. Estates such as Herbet were situated in the suburbs, also known as banlieues, a term that became synonymous with poor working class communities. As a consequence of French colonisation, dozens of banlieues were allocated to house Algerians, Moroccans, and Tunisians.

These neighbourhoods often degenerated into ghettos and no-go zones.

Immigrants encountered prejudice and social marginalisation within the wider French society. In 1973, racist attacks led the Algerian government to suspend emigration of workers. The first protest march “for equality and against racism” was organised by the second generation of immigrants in 1983. Known as the Beur March, the young beurs and beurettes campaigned for public recognition. Consequently, foreign workers were granted ten-year residence and work permits by the Mitterand government.

The anti-racist SOS Racisme organisation arose, supported by the Socialist Party. However, it failed to satisfy the aspirations of many North African youths. Lack of social supports, together with economic decline, led to a void soon filled by Islamist groups that promised new purpose and identity.

Spearheaded by Muslim Brotherhood preachers in the mid 1990s, “basement imams” spread a resurgent Islam characterised by extremism, sexism, anti-Semitism and fear of Westernisation. For women, it brought retreat into patriarchal oppression. Those who did not conform to Islamic precepts, such as dress code, risked summary punishment.

In the belief that the Islamist imams brought social stability, local authorities handed them privileged status as community representatives. At the same time, they snubbed reformers such as Amara, who was battling the sexism espoused by the imams.

Initially, Amara was stirred to action when her five-year-old brother was run over by a drunken driver. The police arrived and harassed her mother, who was hysterical with shock. When Amara screamed at one of the policemen, he started shouting insults about “dirty Arabs”. Later that night, her brother died and the incident soured the relationship between police and residents of the estate.

Aged seventeen, Amara organised a “civic march” to encourage youth to vote. She joined SOS Racisme, and the National Federation of Solidarity Houses that went on to establish almost 300 neighbourhood associations to assist women. Becoming an activist did not sit well with North African parents, so women who joined dissident movements often did so in secret. Nevertheless, around this time, a little freedom seemed possible for second-generation women in the banlieues.

Changes in attitudes began to emerge in the 1990s when girls from Clermont-Ferrand came to the local Solidarity House complaining about growing oppression by males. They were tired of fighting for freedom at home; many were forced to turn nearly all of their salary over to the family, and violence on the estate had increased during a period of unemployment.

Fathers who lost their jobs also lost power within the family and the eldest sons took over. These young men assumed authority in the housing estates and vicious protection of their sisters' virginity. Women became increasingly scrutinised and subjugated; sexual mixing outside the family was forbidden, and there was pressure for girls to remain at home, rather than continue their education. Talk of sexuality had always been a taboo subject in the banlieues and virginity was mandatory. Now, fathers who believed their daughters had sinned demanded a certificate of virginity, and some doctors gave false documents so that girls would avoid violent retribution at home.

Power in the hands of the oldest brother was extended to other young men. Their control over women intensified, and by the mid 1990s, boys had imposed a ban on girls' dress and makeup. With mounting violence, albeit by a minority of young men, girls were running away from home and in need of shelters. Machismo was prevalent and gay men were hounded. When men were in a group, male sexual frustrations found free expression. Any soft or romantic feelings for a girl would vanish, leaving aggression to surface. Within a few years, any previous moves towards sexual equality had been crushed.

At a meeting of National Federation chapters, organised by Amara in 2002, a new association was created to break the silence about violence against women in the banlieues. The Beurs might have seemed an obvious choice to lead this campaign, but the men in the organisation were not interested in women's equality.

The new group, Ni Putes Ni Soumises (NPNS) - Neither Whore Nor Submissive - was named to shock. Its manifesto condemned the pervasive silence regarding sexism, violence, gang rapes, forced marriage, and the brothers who became self-appointed moral police.

NPNS was committed to breaking sexual taboos and defeating the persecution of women. Demands included basic rights to sex and civic education, emergency shelters, mixed sex activities, new child-care centres, a voluntary job program and so on. But their message of female empowerment contravened Islamic lead-

ers' definition of "women's chastity as the basis of communal identity... social and political order".

The stimulus for a major push in the form of a national march was driven by stories of violence involving two young women from the banlieues. Sohane Benziane, aged 18, had been burned alive by a gang leader in the cellar of a housing estate in Vitry-sur-Seine, a suburb of Paris. With courage and

determination, her sister spoke out to raise public attention regarding the violence.

Samira Bellil, another young woman, wrote from personal experience in her book, *Dans l'enfer des tournantes*. She described serial gang rapes that began when she was 14, after her boyfriend handed her over to some of his friends. The first night, they beat and raped her continually but she decided not to file a report, fearing the dishonour it could bring to her family. Possible reprisals were also a concern. These included burned apartments, threats to younger sisters or honour crimes to expunge family shame. The gang rapes continued, as Bellil's attackers felt free to abuse her at any time. When one of them dragged her off a train by the hair, the other passengers chose to pay no attention.

Eventually, she decided to prosecute, and although one of the rapists was found guilty and sentenced to eight years in prison, Bellil met rejection by family and friends. After years in foster homes, on the street, and addicted to drugs, she found psychological help. Her book aimed to lift the silence on the *tournantes*, or gang rapes that had become commonplace. These mob sex attacks were usually directed against independent-minded girls, who used makeup or wore Western clothes.

The young men of the banlieues had a mantra, "all women are whores except my mother." Those words and the ordeals of Benziane and Bellil spurred Amara to organise a five-week march for women's rights in 2003. Her "tour de France" included 23 cities and ended on International Women's Day with a rally of 30,000 people in Paris. Due to the large number of requests following the march, many new NPNS committees were established throughout France.

The marchers' main opposition came from Islamists who heckled and accused them of maligning Islam and Muslim men. A number of militant leftists and fem-

inists also tried to silence debate with calls for “rights to difference” and accusations of neocolonialism.

Amara believed that forced marriage, female genital mutilation and headscarves in secular French schools had no place in the republic. This stand set her against ideas of cultural relativism held by the French feminist movement, and eventually, she removed NPNS from the Comité National des Femmes, a major group of women’s rights organisations.

In her memoir, *Breaking the Silence*, Amara analyses the development of violent misogyny in the estates, citing specific contributing factors: social injustice based on prejudice against ethnic minorities, and cultural traditions that lionized boys. Treated as kings in the home, young men had no status in the outside community. According to Amara, their anger at exclusion led men of the third generation to renounce the values of the republic and unleash their exasperation on the women in their midst. The ensuing violence was aggravated by state neglect and Islamic fundamentalism.

Her recommendations include improved housing, a government challenge to Islamist ideology, and a commitment to secular republican values by the Muslim community. She spoke up for the rights of homosexuals and castigated the militant “soldiers of green fascism” who donned the headscarf as a symbol of freedom.

In contrast to the third generation of immigrants, Amara’s second generation had fought against the hijab as a symbol of restriction. In 2003, a ban on wearing the Islamic veil or other religious items in public schools came into force in the wake of the Stasi commission on laïcité, or French secularism. The commission made 25 recommendations, which included urban renewal schemes, but President Chirac chose to act only on the banning of religious symbols.

In 2007, and still a member of the Socialist party, Amara became Secretary of State for Urban Policies in the UMP government of French Prime Minister François Fillon. After leaving the government, she was appointed Inspector General for Social Affairs in 2011. Her message on violence against women remains relevant and powerful. Of course, sexual attacks are not the only type of aggression in the banlieues, and gang rapes are not limited to poor neighbourhoods. All asylum seekers are not sexual predators, but many were raised in a culture that favours males, demands sexual segregation, defines women by their chastity, and punishes loss of virginity.

In the United Arab Emirates, victims of rape can be imprisoned and flogged under laws that outlaw zina (sex outside marriage), flouting human rights laws already ratified by the UAE. Similar prohibitions against zina exist in Iran, Afghanistan, Morocco and other Muslim majority countries. In spite of existing penalties for rape, the practice of marrying a victim to her rapist is found throughout the Middle East and North Africa. This custom restores her honour and absolves the assailant.

For some Muslim girls living in a free, secular society, as in France, many patriarchal traditions became unacceptable, and they were less inclined to stay at home, tolerate male domination, eschew romantic love and accept an arranged, or forced, marriage.

Amara contends that the patriarchy, combined with a breakdown of family roles, unemployment, social exclusion, and Islamist influence, brought about the gang rapes that plagued the banlieues. But the phenomenon is not confined to these neighbourhoods.

Large gangs of men thought to be asylum seekers, and recently dubbed “Rapefugees,” descended on girls during the 2016 New Year celebrations in the German city of Cologne. Local police received over 500 complaints, many alleging sexual assault. Some of the women who testified said they were terrified for their lives, particularly as police protection appeared to be absent. Similar assaults were reported in other German cities; also in Salzburg, Zurich and Helsinki.

The political elite of the European Union will need to tackle the surge in sexual attacks and avoid the neglect and paralysis that has led to ineffective border control of asylum seekers, characterised by a majority of lone young males, unconstrained by family.

Allegedly, sex attacks are an “everyday event” in some German refugee registration centres. Brutal sex assaults have been documented in the UK, Sweden, Norway, Holland, Belgium, and Australia. Many of the perpetrators believed that women who did not fit their mould of female modesty and morals were fair game for abuse.

Even Islamic dress does not always afford protection, as attested by women in Egypt, where sexual harassment and group assaults, known as taharrush gamea,

are notorious. In attacks similar to those in Cologne, women described being surrounded by a “circle of hell.” In the past, Egypt had no laws that defined sexual harassment and women were often blamed by the police when they sought assistance, but after an escalation of incidents following the Arab Spring uprising, new legislation was introduced to criminalise unwanted sexual advances.

In her book, Amara highlights the neglect and ill-advised approach of French authorities as important contributing factors in perpetuating the violence in the banlieues. In particular, she deplores the decision to accredit Islamists as spokesmen of the neighbourhoods in the belief they would bring stability. Such a policy was particularly misguided in view of Algeria’s prevalent civil war (1991 – 2002), in which Islamist groups were targeting women for gang rapes and sexual slavery. The French government would have had intimate knowledge of the war between the Algerian government and Islamist factions, an armed conflict that claimed over 100,000 lives.

Today, some Islamist groups operate freely in the West. Acceptance of Islamist-leaning NGOs such as the Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR) has been a staple of the United States Administration. At President Obama’s recent State of the Union address, members of CAIR were present, while activists from organisations such as the Muslim Reform Movement were overlooked.

To some extent, Western leaders’ hands are tied. Apart from the strictures of cultural relativism and its expression in political correctness, there are valid fears of civil unrest, self-defence vigilantes, ascendance of far right parties, and concerns about jeopardising cooperation with Muslim communities, deemed essential for surveillance. Furthermore, community leaders are not always representative and may tend to Islamist views.

There have also been moves to tighten laws against denigration of ethnic groups. Such a law found Swedish Democrat politician Michael Hess guilty of incitement to racial hatred when he associated Islamic culture with rape. If freedom of speech is being curtailed, there is little incentive for those who might wish to speak out.

Conforming to the principle of cultural relativism, the global feminist movement has not generally spoken out to denounce Islamist sexism. In that context, feminist abandonment of women in the banlieues had been denounced by NPNS.

Today, the debate concerning relativism versus universalism remains unresolved, and the case for universal human rights embodied by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) needs reaffirmation. Moreover, the Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam, an Islamic response to the UDHR, upholds sharia law as the source of reference. This protocol was adopted by member states of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference in 1990.

Despite feminist adherence to relativism, it is possible that attitudes might be changing. Anna Schwarzer, German feminist and editor of Emma.de magazine, suggested that political Islamists might have provoked and coordinated the recent New Year sexual assaults in Europe. Franco-Egyptian feminist, Serenade Chafik, believes the mob attacks serve as an Islamist weapon of war to intimidate women and force them out of the public space, whilst exposing Western men as helpless. Chafik believes Islamist incitement by religious authorities is legitimising a sexual jihad in the West as part of a “new strategy of destabilisation.”

Such views are rare in feminist circles and Amara was never so forthright. However, she was a trailblazer for dissidents prepared to speak out and act as stimuli for change in a deep-rooted, archaic patriarchy, chafed by confrontation with modernity.

Mustering the grassroots within her society, Amara offered France - the faltering wellspring of modern human rights - a model that challenged barbaric misogyny. In the process, she shamed the Republic, confronted Islamist enemies of civil society, and survived to tell the tale.

Dr Ida Lichter is a psychiatrist and writer in the UK and Australia. She is the author of Muslim Women Reformers: Inspiring Voices Against Oppression, published by Prometheus Books.

DIARISING THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF POLITICS

Battleground: Why the Liberal Party Shirtfronted Tony Abbott

By Wayne Errington and Peter van Onselen

Melbourne University Press 2015

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Inside The Hawke-Keating Government

By Gareth Evans

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Reviewed by Dr Stephen Matchett

In their instant autopsy of Tony Abbott as prime minister - *Battleground: Why the Liberal Party Shirtfronted Tony Abbott* - Wayne Errington and Peter van Onselen present his failure in office as the inevitable consequence of a character ill-suited to the times and an utter absence of the political arts of manipulation, explanation and conversation.

But how did Mr Abbott's staggering-from-the-start prime ministership look to him? Surely different to the caricature of incompetence they present.

Unless Mr Abbott kept a diary which he one day publishes we will never know. Which will be a shame, because just about the only way he can respond to the wrecking of his reputation as a competent politician by Errington and van Onselen is to reveal what he thought and why he acted as he did.

As Gareth Evans demonstrated a couple of years back, there is nothing like a self-aware and revealing diary written during and published after a political career to present a past politician in such a warts and all way that readers may not like him or her but at least will have a sense of their humanity and intentions.

But Evans also showed how even in the easier 1980s the boundless sea of politics changed from serenity to storm in hours and how ego and ambition, arrogance and obsession created continuing chaos. The poisons of parliament and the news spin cycle were slower then – but still dangerous and dizzying.

If there is one thing that unites Evans diary and Abbott's record over the decades, it is that politics is about commitment and capacity, consistency and calm and the ability to apply authority that is proportionate to the prize. It is all a matter of character, the ability to deal with all sorts of people in all sorts of circumstances, to stay focused on policy goals among the insults and obfuscation of daily politics that decides a leader's fate.

As Machiavelli put it:

I know that every one will confess that it would be most praiseworthy in a prince to exhibit all the above qualities that are considered good; but because they can neither be entirely possessed nor observed, for human conditions do not permit it, it is necessary for him to be sufficiently prudent that he may know how to avoid the reproach of those vices which would lose him his state; and also to keep himself, if it be possible, from those which would not lose him it; but this not being possible, he may with less hesitation abandon himself to them. And again, he need not make himself uneasy at incurring a reproach for those vices without which the state can only be saved with difficulty, for if everything is considered carefully, it will be found that something which looks like virtue, if followed, would be his ruin; whilst something else, which looks like vice, yet followed brings him security and prosperity.

Policy failure did not bring Kevin Rudd down – rather, it was the way he presented himself to the people around him. It is similarly central to Errington and van Onselen's analysis that Abbott's commitment to Chief of Staff Peta Credlin sent clear signals to his party colleagues that his allegiance was not to them. Was it so? An Abbott diary would be revealing.

Even for self-aware politicians who present a disciplined public persona, rarely revealing everything to their intimates, a diary can be a window to a political soul, albeit one opened after the author has left office.

Inevitably, a diary written for release, or which the author later decides to publish, must be taken on trust as a record of an individual's actions and emotions at time

of writing – a test that some contemporary Australian efforts are too polished to pass.

Certainly social media makes it harder for politicians who variously tweet and record their lives for Facebook friends to use a diary to re-write their record. When opinions and actions are recorded hour by hour there is no room for rewriting records. From the politics of the personal to the most public of lives, every opinion and emotion we so easily express is now on the record.

There is also the enduring problem of what cannot be revealed for decades after the events a diary records. For all but political historians, this is not such a problem. As the cabinet papers annually reveal there is nothing as exact as the actions of long-retired ministers in ancient political crises. The way we live now makes the immediate out of date in the merest of moments and it is hard to imagine what could appear in hypothetical Abbott diaries published a decade after he departed public life of anything other than antiquarian interest.

But these are phenomena for the future and, until 2000 or so, diarists could deliver insights into the confusion of policy-making and the chaos of political life of the kind that to Errington and van Onselen's eyes overwhelmed Mr Abbott.

As Sean Scalmer and Nathan Hollier describe the diarist's purpose (*Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 2009), "political diaries convey the texture and rhythms of parliamentary political life better — more completely — than any other source. They throw a special light on what life is like for actors within the parliament, the executive, and the parties."

The Brits, who made the twentieth century political diary their own, at least in the anglo-sphere, set a standard that Australian practitioners do not try to match. According to Tory diarists Giles Brandreth (one-time whip and raconteur) and the late Alan Clark, (some-time junior minister and mad womaniser) the good political diary has four elements at time of writing; it is immediate, indiscrete, intimate and indecipherable. They left one "i" out - intact. A published diary that is not presented as it was at time of writing but is tidied in the interests of presenting prescience is a fraud on the public.

But the Brits, at least the posh ones, being who they are, as diarists are often also fascinated by the sex and social lives of their subjects; especially the ones who are

not quite proper persons. The fascination was especially forensic when diarist and minister Edwina Currie outed her own affair with Prime Minister John Major.

By such salacious standards Australian diarists do not measure up, as Neal Blewett, the author of his own cabinet diary (1999) explained in a 2006 essay on writing by Australian political participants for the ANU e-press: “The political diary is usually aimed at political junkies. It tends to be dense with material, often in a pretty undigested form. There is not much selectivity, often for very good reasons, and is often, as a result, rather turgid.”

Dr Blewett’s published version was rather more packaged than some of the more notorious UK diaries, notably Alan Clark’s. As Blewett explained:

Pruning the prose made it, hopefully, more lucid, but I tried to avoid any change in substance, tone or judgments. I did restructure the cabinet discussions to make them easier for readers to follow but at the same time sought to remain true to the arguments advanced by the ministers. Finally, given the concerns of the libel lawyers, I modified a few intemperate remarks about senior colleagues and excised about a dozen candid comments on minor figures.

Despite the tempered tones of most published diaries by Australian politicians over the years, publishers have assumed a market exists for a surprisingly substantial number of them, identified by Sean Scalmer and Nathan Hollier in the *Australian Journal of Politics and History* (2009) as starting in the 1970s with R G Casey’s diary as foreign minister. Diarists from both sides of the divide followed, including conservatives R G Menzies, Paul Hasluck and Peter Howson and Labor men Clyde Cameron, Neal Blewett, Mark Latham and Bob Carr. There is also a mass of memoirs that rely on diaries and contemporary notes, such as Graham Richardson’s revealing *Whatever It Takes*.

And now Gareth Evans has joined them. The sometime Labor minister was just 41 when writing his diary and went on to a long post parliamentary career, as head of the International Crisis Group and now an active chancellor of the Australian National University. His energy for administration and bureaucratic ability are obvious in his diary record as a minister in the first three and a half years of what we now call the Hawke-Keating Government, a descriptor that would have surprised Evans then.

While the Keating leadership alternative emerges in these pages it is plain that Prime Minister Hawke made the calls, although Evans did see hints of what was to come.

There is no doubt that this is a contemporary record, with Mr Evans responding to the routine rapacity of politics rather than making what would now be seen as prescient predictions about what turned out to be a very good government. As such, the diary stands as a superior source on how we were governed as Australia began to grapple with globalisation.

Or at times, how we weren't – the chaos that occurs when policy and the pursuit of power, administration and ambition all intersect endures in the diary. Thus, Evans records Paul Keating's "Option C" tax proposals in 1985, which is worth reading for anybody who believes root and branch revenue reform is possible and who does not grasp the scope of the Howard-Costello GST achievement.

It's pretty obvious that several dimensions at least of the Keating package, and in particular some of the assaults on tax shelters and perks are simply going to be too rugged to survive political attack. But, equally, it is one of those situations where the most radical and far-reaching option may in the long run, because of the scope it offers for delivering goodies, prove more palatable than some of the less extreme alternatives. Keating sees this very clearly but he is having a lot of difficulty carrying the allegedly more radical members of the cabinet with him.

Evans was right, but it took another 15 years before John Howard and Peter Costello acted on the larger lesson of Option C, that without the imprimatur of the people expressed at an election special pleaders will always manipulate the system to stop change.

For the Sydney Institute readers old enough to remember these years, the acuity of Evans' observation and analysis will activate memories of the era and, while the names and circumstances have changed, the essential issues stay the same.

The green-left stood for obstruction and obfuscation. "I seek to chase down the Democrats to find out what is happening ... but they are all, as usual, rafting or rainforested or talking about energy from beetroot," Evans despairs in September 1985.

The Labor machine knew that all politics is local. Thus, Evans reports briefing a Victorian Labor Unity meeting: “They all seem much keener to get on with the debate about ballot rigging and branch stacking in the western suburbs.”

The press gallery is – well, it is the press gallery. Evans writes about a chat with Michelle Grattan, “I did reasonably well with Michelle at least by comparison with last year, but I really am appalled, as always, by the relentless superficiality of it all, and the speed, and pure chance, with which judgements that are enormously important in public terms are formed.”

And while Evans, first attorney general and then energy minister for the duration of the diaries, does not appear especially interested in economics, the country’s unsustainable situation intrudes: “Cabinet was overwhelmingly preoccupied today with the disrepair into which the whole Australian economy seems to be rapidly sliding as a result of our terms of trade problems,” he wrote in May 1986.

But the intrusion is not overwhelming, despite the now orthodoxy that Labor in government then was obsessed with tax reform, deregulating financial markets, the budget and BOPs, they only make marginal appearances. Evans only makes a notice of record entry of Keating’s “banana republic” warning a week later, noting “all hell has been breaking loose” and that Prime Minister Hawke was not pleased.

Although the economy did not consume all his attention, Evans could not escape the inevitable difficulties of governing, compounded by the ambitions and egocentricities of his colleagues. His assessment of ministers’ motivation is as close as he comes to the British requirement for indiscretion in diaries. Apart from attending a party for the “most beautiful woman of her generation” at the University of Melbourne and a reference to a colleague’s female admirers in the press gallery, it appears that all Senator Evans’ machiavells were monastic in their tastes.

But not necessarily competent. Evans dismisses Deputy Prime Minister Lionel Bowen, “Another classic demonstration of Lionel’s complete lack of any self-discipline when it comes to talking on matters in which he has some personal interest.” John Dawkins “brought a good deal” of criticism upon himself “as a result of the manic self-promotion that he and his office have been going on with for the last couple of years.” (Granted, this was years before Dawkins’ epic restructure of higher and further education). John Button’s lauded political nous is his “infinite capacity to shirk difficult jobs”.

As for Bob Hawke, the PM who removed Evans from being attorney general, he picked a big reason for his demise very early, in June 1986: “Anyone determined to be so macho in asserting his leadership and so insensitive to the dynamics of a Labor government is riding for a fall.”

Above all, Evans recognised Paul Keating’s brilliance and ambivalence. In January 1985, he records what was to become a familiar Keating statement, that he would be happy to walk away from politics to make money and talk antiques. By October, Evans was reporting talk of Keating taking the leadership after an 1987 election win. “The Keating motif” was embedded in “every conversation one has around Parliament House these days, he has certainly made an incredibly strong mark”. The next year, Evans recognised Keating’s achievement in deregulating interest rates on new home loans and his obvious willingness to burn political capital to achieve essential reforms.

There is no doubt that this whole affair has been, once again, a considerable triumph for Paul Keating’s particular brand of economic rationalism, combined with persistence and a willingness to take political risks. I think he is absolutely right on this issue, and it’s clear that he will retain at least the tacit support of most of the NSW members of parliament, but there is equally no doubt that a reasonable size job has been done on him by a number of people all too keen to get even for the authority he has exercised in NSW over a number of years and that is something he will just have to ride out.

The diary ends before the epochal economic changes of the late 1980s and the struggle between Hawke and Keating for the leadership but Evans certainly was aware of the battle lines being drawn.

Evans was also clear-eyed about himself. If self-awareness is any indication, Evans was not a bad judge of political character – he certainly was aware of the way he gave people the political shits, not least the PM, who was obviously exasperated with him at times, and Foreign Minister Bill Hayden did not always welcome Evans’ help as assistant minister and Senate spokesman. “I’ll have to get a seatbelt to handle the swoops and plunges that now seem irrevocably part of Hayden’s dealings with me,” he wrote after one 1986 attempt to be helpful did not go well.

But the biggest bad career call in these years was his deep concern with the fate of former Labor AG and High Court judge Lionel Murphy who was dragged through inquiries, courts and media over corruption charges. As Evans recorded

in 1985 after a blue with NSW Premier Neville Wran over who was best help for their mutual mate, “it was my consistent support for Murphy for 18 months that had lost me a lot of credibility with my ministerial colleagues and the press”.

Throughout the diaries, Evans details his belief that Murphy was done grave wrongs by the courts, press and various corruption inquiries in which he was named, devoting time and attention to an issue which was personally important but was surely second order compared to the need to transform the national economy. It demonstrates that it is impossible to recognise what history will reveal matters when caught up in creating it. What Evans demonstrates is that life where the storm fronts of politics and governing collide is always chaotic and exhausting and that rather than set a course, on the much traversed but always changing ocean of governing, the best that even the most skilled voyagers can do is hold on and hope.

Evans defined what it takes to be a prime minister: “A capacity to rationalise anything is a necessary prerequisite, if you let your confidence be knocked around by your mistakes you would be buried deep in the bunker most of the time.”

For all the accepted wisdom that the 1980s were a golden age of policy courage the diaries demonstrate how the chaos of politics came close to overwhelming competent ministers on a daily basis.

Not that this worried some of the reviewers. “It was a golden era of reform and government and its success holds a trove of lessons for today’s generation of politicians,” Denis Atkins wrote in the *Courier Mail* (29 August 2014). David Day saw the diary’s value as a source on the looming struggle between Hawke and Keating rather than any insight into the policy process (*Australian Book Review*, December 2014). “They offer a rare glimpse into the inner workings of a period still recalled for its impressive strokes of policy and achievement,” Jonathan Green agreed in *The Age* (1 November 2014). Or as Nick Richardson put it, they are “a compelling record of a government that created great things within its multitalented Cabinet.” (*Herald Sun*, 11 October 2014).

Only Peter Craven (*The Australian*, 25 October 2014) got it;

This is a dazzling and diverting account, by a born raconteur and politics incorrigible, of what it is like to be a team player in an extremely talented government when

you have a hankering for personal integrity and a strong tendency towards megalomania, but with plenty of irony and style to help wash it down. ... Evans has produced an impressive, intimate view of government of the most blow-by-blow kind. This is a book that will fascinate everyone with a feeling for the human face of politics and for the fact it needs to be defended.

Who knows whether a Tony Abbott diary, of the Evans kind, or one kept by a loyal senior minister, or staffer, would restore his reputation as prime minister – but they could not hurt.

As things stand, if Errington and Van Onselen's dissection of Tony Abbott's time in office goes unchallenged his reputation as PM will be terminally trashed.

The fundamental assumption of their book is that while an immensely successful opposition leader Abbott was simply not up to the job and they invoke the ultimate insult of Australian politics, the Billy McMahon comparison, to make the point: "Abbott's failure was all his own work. Vain, untrustworthy and unpleasant, McMahon has been superseded in prime-ministerial failure by Tony Abbott."

Errington and van Onselen set out a range of reasons why his parliamentary party pushed Abbott. Above all his loyalty to chief of staff Peta Credlin cost him support, but in their assessment this was just the first among equals of many matters. Process and policy were second to politics in his office, upsetting the electorally attuned backbench and conservative base in the process. He had a tin-ear for community attitudes, demonstrated by making Prince Philip a knight. His firmly held beliefs were from another age and his strong sense of loyalty selective. He came to office promising to undo Labor policies but had no coherent agenda of his own and he learnt nothing from the failed 15 February spill motion against him. As they write:

What ultimately became Abbott's most damaging political sin was his failure to reprint and change. The broken promises, the zealotry, the unconscious bias, the shouting, the failure to listen and the misguided loyalty could all have been forgiven if Abbott had meant what he said about changing the way he governed. He couldn't expect loyalty from his MPs if he wasn't prepared to humble himself enough to respect their ability to remove him from office.

But while they do not make much of it, their core point surely is that a man with the makings of an innately Australian leader simply did not connect: “Abbott was a leader at permanent risk of coming across as out of touch, despite his many community activities, such as surf lifesaving and fire-fighting.”

Tough stuff, and typical of an unremittingly critical text that interprets Abbott’s term as PM through the prism of his final failure, that sees every act as the result of his personality, which simply was not suited for high office. This is not a book that looked for positives, as Ross Fitzgerald pointed out:

A more even-handed analysis would at least involve highlighting some of his government’s achievements. How the Abbott government managed to stop the boats, repeal taxes, remove a mass of unnecessary regulations, initiate major infrastructure, start the task of budget repair, finalise three free-trade agreements and keep the nation safe under such difficult circumstances is also a story that needs to be told. To my mind, Errington and van Onselen in their punchy exegesis don’t even try to begin telling it. (The Australian, 12 December 2015)

And there may be a much simpler explanation of Abbott’s failures. He, like so many before him, was just overwhelmed by the chaos of governing. As Dennis Altman put it in the *Sydney Morning Herald* (16 December 2015): “Is it not more likely the case that Abbott lacked the skills to manage the complexities of government, and no amount of ‘self-authenticity’ would have resolved this?”

Errington and van Onselen provide no sense of what life within Mr Abbott’s office was like or any sense of his motivations, which a diary would reveal.

If there was ever a case for a diary to expand our understanding of a government Abbott’s is it.

Stephen Matchett writes www.campusmorningmail.com.au

WHAT DID YOU DO IN THE WAR DADDY?

The Secret War: Spies, Codes and Guerrillas 1939-1945

By Max Hastings

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RRP – \$32.99

Reviewed by Ross Fitzgerald

While almost all historical narratives, including the recent account of the intertwined lives of John and Sunday Reed, are of necessity tentative and speculative, as Sir Max Hastings argues in his most recent book, *The Secret War*, “they become far more so when spies are involved”.

As Hastings explains, when chronicling battles, writers can relatively reliably record how many ships were sunk and aircraft shot down, how much ground was won or lost and how many soldiers and sailors were killed. But secret intelligence generates, as he usefully puts it, “a vast, unreliable literature, some of it produced by protagonists for their own glorification or justification”.

It is pleasing to report that, in researching and writing this fascinating book, Hastings has followed his own advice that “skepticism is essential about all accounts related to intelligence in every nation, and thus to the memoirs of agents, official reports, published histories and even contemporary documents”. This is because almost all participants in all fields associated with supposedly secret intelligence, especially in a conflict as extended as World War II, are likely to a greater or lesser extent to have lied, or at least to have hidden much of the truth. Indeed, often it was their job to do so.

In this monumental book, Hastings has exploited massive archives in Britain, Germany and the United States. In particular, he has uncovered and effectively utilised a treasure trove of previously untranslated Russian material. In doing so, he reveals and reinforces the fact that, while Britain’s contribution to the Allied Victory may have been subordinate to that of the Soviet Union and the USA, in the main, Winston Churchill made much more effective use of secret materials than did either Hitler or Stalin – who were both extremely suspicious of their re-

spective intelligence agencies.

Probably the most productive secret agent during World War II was Richard Sorge - who worked for the Red Army's intelligence organisation GRU. However, because of Stalin's paranoid response to the material Sorge supplied, his influence upon actual Kremlin policy is much more doubtful. The same applies to the information supplied by an American, Harry Dexter White, who was one of Moscow's most important secret sources.

Hastings quite rightly concludes that Allied code breaking operations against Germany, Italy and Japan, especially the English operation based at Bletchley Park, 50 miles from London, "exercised far more influence than did any spy". Indeed, in a key chapter entitled "Guerrilla", Hastings also concludes that code breakers, especially in Great Britain, were collectively more important than all the resistance fighters and partisans in France and the rest of Europe put together.

As is now widely known, most prominent among the hugely talented team of code breakers at Bletchley Park was Alan Turing - a mathematician from Cambridge University. As a result of being persecuted for being homosexual, Turing committed suicide in 1954, sixteen days before his 42nd birthday. He died from cyanide poisoning.

A pivotal section of *The Secret War* involves Hastings deeply rooted skepticism about the performance of MI6. In this, he is clearly influenced by a number of informed contemporary witnesses who thought poorly of Stewart Menzies - commonly known as "C" - and of some of his senior officers. This especially applies to the historian and noted German linguist Hugh Trevor-Roper and author Malcolm Muggeridge - both of whom worked for British intelligence and had a very jaundiced view of Menzies.

But other more impartial observers also had a negative, if not quite as disparaging, opinion of the work of the head of MI6. These sources included the chairman of Britain's Joint Intelligence Committee, Bill Bentinck; the Permanent Under Secretary at the Foreign Office, Sir Alexander Cadogan, and especially Nigel Clive who worked extensively for MI6. When they criticised Menzies' lack of ability in supervising British spy craft and other forms of intelligence, all three cultivated Englishmen, in their assessment of the head of MI6, as the author puts it, "had no axes to grind".

Yet Hastings is the first to admit that a number of the intelligence foot soldiers and new recruits who flooded into Broadway (the headquarters of MI6) were “exotic”!

The supremely cynical Muggeridge wrote: “Writers of thrillers tend to gravitate to the secret service as surely as the mentally unstable become psychiatrists, or the impotent pornographers.” While much of this assessment is hyperbole, Hastings seems in some ways to concur. “Thus,” he writes, “was Graham Greene dispatched to Freetown, Sierra Leone; Muggeridge himself – a veteran foreign correspondent – to Lourenco Marques, in Portuguese Mozambique; and the journalist Kim Philby welcomed into Broadway.”

As Hastings starkly concludes, it became “a source of dismay to career intelligence officers, protective of MI6’s reputation, that its wartime recruits who later commanded most public attention were all either mavericks or traitors.”

Hastings is particularly revealing about the intelligence career of Malcolm Muggeridge who, for two years, was MI6’s main man in Lourenco Marques. There he lodged at the Polana hotel along with Dr Leopold Werz, the German vice-consul and representative in Mozambique of Abwehr, the German security agency. Muggeridge, unforgettably, described this notorious Nazi intelligence operative as “youthful, blond, pink and earnest!”

As well as shining considerable light on Allied intelligence-gatherers and their ostensible leaders, *The Secret War* reveals much about the leaders on the German side. This especially applies to the head of Abwehr, Admiral Wilhelm Canaris.

Controversially but plausibly, Hastings summarises the situation thus: “Far from being a substantial historical figure, (Canaris) was a small one, grappling with dilemmas and difficulties far beyond his capabilities.” Trevor-Roper professed to see a close resemblance between admiral Canaris and Stewart Menzies – his British counterpart. Both men, he thought, were “conservative, honourable – and weak”.

Yet because of its feudal suzerainty and tight control over Bletchley Park, by the end of the war MI6’s influence, and reputation especially in Great Britain, had soared.

As Hastings explains in the book’s final chapter, “Decoding Victory”, Menzies kept

his job as “C” until 1952. This was despite Kim Philby’s betrayal to Moscow of MI6’s most sensitive early Cold War operations and informants, which resulted in the loss of many lives. As it eventuated, Menzies lived in what seemed to be untroubled retirement until his death in 1968.

In the autumn of 1945, Trevor-Roper, who by that time probably knew more about the Abwehr than any German, was commissioned by MI6 to travel to Berlin and explore the circumstances of the Fuhrer’s death. This enabled him to turn his subsequent report into a best-selling book, *The Last Days of Hitler*. Thereafter, at Oxford University, he resumed his career as a brilliant and widely read historian.

However, Trevor-Roper’s reputation as a scholar was tarnished, probably permanently, by his endorsement of the authenticity of the 1983 “Hitler diaries” – which turned out to be fake. Controversial, cantankerous, and snobbish to the end, Trevor-Roper died in 2003.

Although a little too long and sometimes cluttered with detail, *The Secret War* is a prodigious work of scholarship. Moreover, it is hard to disagree with Hastings’ statement that “while skepticism about the secret world is indispensable, so too is a capacity for wonder”.

As this brilliant analysis reveals, some tales about European spy craft and code breaking, especially from 1939 to 1945, which once seemed too fabulous to be real have now proven to be true. I will not spoil prospective readers’ enjoyment by detailing what they are.

The only weakness in Hastings’ gripping narrative is the infuriating overuse of the utterly unnecessary phrase “of course”. A competent copy editor would have eliminated them all. And, for the record, in *The Secret War* Australia does not receive a single mention.

Professor Fitzgerald, a columnist with The Australian, most recently co-authored the political/sexual satire Going Out Backwards : A Grafton Everest Adventure. Professor Fitzgerald is currently researching and co-authoring, A Dozen Soviet Spies Down Under?

GRAFTON TAKES A TUMBLE

Going Out Backwards: A Grafton Everest Adventure

By Ross Fitzgerald & Ian McFadyen Hybrid Publishers 2015

ISBN: 9781925272109

RRP - \$26.9 pb

Reviewed by Gerard Henderson

Barry Humphries has described Grafton Everest as “a wonderful creation” in the same ranks as Philip Roth’s Portnoy and Kingsley Amis’s Lucky Jim. Dr Everest (for a doctor he is) makes a welcome return in *Going Out Backwards: A Grafton Everest Adventure*. This is the fifth appearance by Professor (for a professor he also is) Grafton in print. On this occasion via the combined work of Ross Fitzgerald (the Sydney-based Emeritus Professor of History and Politics at Griffith University) and the Brisbane-based writer/actor/director/comedian Ian McFadyen (who is best known as the creator of The Comedy Company). *Going Out Backwards* should contain a “Beware: This Book May Offend” warning. In the sensitive age in which we live, the combined comedic talents of Fitzgerald and McFadyen are likely to offend – in no particular order – nude artists, Tim Flannery, lesbians, pole-dancers, environmentalists, Terry O’Gorman, ABC female presenters who look like models, civil libertarians, inner-city crims, university vice-chancellors, group sex practitioners, trade union officials (especially of Scottish background), avant-garde painters, Annabel Crabb, Tony Jones, Maoist dressing leftists plus sandal wearers. And more besides – including eco-catastrophists. Plus those who are weight-challenged. So who is your man Everest who is capable of being such an equal opportunity offender? Well Grafton Everest turned 60 on Christmas Day in (presumably) 2014. He wears a white Panama hat and sleeps in a Collingwood football jumper. A reformed

alcoholic and non-reformed glutton, Everest suffers from anxiety. So much so that, before eating, he removes his jumper and puts it back on inside-out. That way, any food stains will be on the inside. Clever, eh? Due to an anxiety/ obsessive condition, Grafton likes to “look forwards [sic] (as Grafton’s old man used to say), a tradition Grafton has continued, to certain events – and structures his life accordingly. Take sex, for example. Everest’s many past assignations have had undesired outcomes. He’s convinced that he so upset one paramour that she decided to become a lesbian – in this romp she turns up in the novel as prime minister. Other affairs resulted in litigation or the engagement of hit men. So Everest settled down with one woman – Janet – and settled for anxiety-free infrequent but regular sex every second Sunday afternoon as something to look forwards to. It worked like this. Every 14 days, Janet would announce that she had just put a load of washing in the machine and might as well lie down until it had gone full cycle. This was Grafton’s invitation and opportunity – an event which gives new meaning to the phrase “having a tumble”. As perceptive readers may have noticed, the above account is written in the past tense. You see, Everest suffered prostate cancer and the resultant operation, while technically successful, left him impotent. However, since *Going Out Backwards* is a farce, it comes as no surprise that, due to modern medicine, towards the end of the novel Everest takes a viagra-on-steroids substance after which he exhibits, er, a permanent interest in sex. No doubt we will find out for how long in the next book in the series – since Everest likes talking about himself. In short, Professor/ Doctor Grafton Everest is an out-and-proud narcissist. It so happens that this condition gives him the ability to savour life while recognising its follies. Everest has attained the rank of “Emeritus Professor of Lifestyles and Wellbeing at the University of Mangoland”, a modern day tertiary institution which self-assesses its ranking and outsources its teaching to provide more time for developing – yes, you’ve guessed it – a corporate plan. The University of Mangoland has retained its course in Gay and Lesbian Mathematics. Other extant courses include Peace Studies, Apocalypse

Studies, Non-Western Medicine, Non-Invasive Agriculture and Future Genders. A former female interest obtained a doctorate, plus a professorship, for undertaking “a one-woman avant-garde performance piece in the nude”. Moreover Grafton and Janet’s daughter, the 29 year old Lee-Anne, has a Ph.D. in Pole Dancing (Hons) from the Hugh Hefner University in Southern California. Well, at least Ph.Ds in pole dancing are qualified to climb poles. But what does a professor of lifestyles and wellbeing do? Except prepare for a role as a pro-vice chancellor. In any event, without any planning, Grafton Everest finds himself elected to the Senate as an independent, per courtesy of one of those preference-whisperer operatives. The authors seem more familiar with the realities of universities and the media than they are with parliamentary politics. But Everest is able to use his status as holding the balance of power in the Senate – along with representatives of the Australian Beer Drinkers Party, the A-Gender Party, the Involuntary Euthanasia Party and Orgasm Party – to advance himself. He becomes quite a force, to be sure. Everest’s attempt to reform universities goes off the rails. But he takes advantage of media opportunities. So Grafton appears on “Bathroom Cabinet”, where ABC presenter Yolanda Yabbie visits politicians at home to discuss their health and beauty requirements along with their medication. Ms Yabbie shows footage of politicians’ bathrooms. Sound familiar? Everest also makes an appearance on the ABC TV’s QED program where the audience turns up with copies of The Guardian stuffed in their pockets and where the presenter Roger Smith is less a moderator than an excessively loquacious provocateur. Sound familiar? Grafton, an obsessive with no friends, certainly knows who his enemies are. Namely, totalitarian inclined eco-catastrophists. The plot of Going Out Backwards is, well, complicated. So much so that it’s best read with a Gin & Tonic or, perhaps, two. Or perhaps more. Reforming alcoholics, like Everest, should eat lotsa dessert when reading, to increase their sugar load. Grafton worked out long ago that “desserts” is “stressed” spelt backwards. It’s not clear what this means – but, then, Professor Everest is neurotic. The good news is that your man Everest saves his prime minister

and his country – along with himself, his wash-a-lot wife and his poll-dancing daughter. But the point of Professor/Doctor Grafton Everest's return in *Going Out Backwards* is not to make sense but to engender laughs. In this endeavour, the authors have well and truly succeeded. This particular reviewer looks forwards to the return of your man Everest in a sixth outing.

Dr Gerard Henderson is executive director of The Sydney Institute, a columnist with the Weekend Australian and author (most recently) of Santamaria – A Most Unusual Man (MP 2015)

MIXING IT WITH THE MITFORDS

Take Six Girls – The Lives of the Mitford Sisters

By Laura Thompson

Head Zeus 2015

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RRP - \$39.99 hb

Reviewed by Anne Henderson

To give something of the flavour of the amorality and perverse jollity of popular post-war UK writer Nancy Mitford, author Laura Thompson in her recently released *Take Six Girls: The Lives of the Mitford Sisters* quotes Nancy in a letter to a friend writing: “Randolph C[hurchill] tried to rape me. It was very funny.” For any not familiar with Nancy Mitford’s style, her tendency to exaggerate (as in “rape”) and laugh at the outrageous is captured succinctly in this short comment.

In our politically correct times, recollections of the lives of the six Mitford sisters – products of an entrenched British aristocratic milieu of the early to mid twentieth century – are not so easy to fathom. Unless you have been or still are a fan or reader of Nancy Mitford’s heady and hilarious novels centring on the Radletts of Alconleigh as a fictional version of the Mitford children and their terrifying Uncle Matthew based on their father, David Mitford, the second Baron Redesdale.

India Knight, reviewing an edited collection of the Mitford sisters’ letters for *The Times* in 2007, called the lives of the Mitford sisters “the story of the twentieth century, told from the front row”. This is very true - in relation to Britain, Europe and quite a bit of North America. Thompson recognises that the combination of such “blithe Mitford confidence” with the clash of rivalry and attention seeking among such a cluster of female energy at a time when upper class women had few roles other than the social and domestic was to be expected.

In this, it is not surprising that the most outrageous of the Mitford sisters set their caps at extreme ideological moorings through social contact rather than formative indoctrination. Diana would scandalise first by leaving her perfect marriage to Bryan Guinness, heir to a fortune, (and two young sons) to become one of the British fascist leader Oswald Mosely’s mistresses and later his second wife. Her fascist beliefs went undaunted; she visited Nazi Germany and Adolf Hitler prior to the war, although would never become a Nazi like her sister Unity who, besotted

like a schoolgirl over a pop idol (her sister Deborah described Unity as a “stalker”), mixed in Hitler’s circles and attempted to kill herself when war was declared. Being related to both Winston Churchill and his wife Clementine, the Mitford sisters offered Hitler information on the British.

Jessica Mitford, at the other extreme, would abandon her family to marry her strident communist cousin Esmond Romilly and relocate to the United States. She would continue her rage at the Mitford capitalist milieu to the extent of demanding that a sixth of the family’s meagre estate, a boat ride from the Isle of Mull, be given to the Communist Party, even as her mother struggled after David Mitford’s death in March 1958.

The Mitford sisters – Nancy (1904–1973), Pamela (1907-1994), Diana (1910-2003), Unity (1914-1948), Jessica (1917-1996) and Deborah (1920-2014) or, as Thompson labels them, “Writer; Countrywoman; Fascist, Nazi; Communist; Duchess” – were making their own headlines well before Nancy Mitford became a popular novelist. Most of the headlines the Mitford sisters made were scandalous, leaving the reducing fortunes of their father Baron Redesdale to continue alongside his immediate family’s diminishing reputation throughout the 1930s and early 1940s. Lone brother Tom Mitford (1909-1945) could be counted on to hold steady the family name, but he would be killed in Burma in the last stages of the Pacific War.

As Laura Thompson makes clear in her enticing study of the lives of the six Mitford girls, their early family life around David and Sydney (the Redesdale parents) was not particularly different from the way most of their aristocratic peers (“Hons” as Nancy called them in her novels) passed their time. After their father had inherited the title and land from his father Bertie in 1916, the family pursued the usual round of hunts and long weekends and all manner of social interaction among the gentry. Girls were educated “at home” – something that irked Jessica Mitford for the rest of her life – and boys went to Eton or some such equivalent.

The British elite was not only well connected but also well and truly intermarried so that the picture of its activities is that of a large extended family – with its loyalties and enmities, scandals and secrets and much infidelity.

The Mitford family shifted abode a number of times as David moved the family from their modest home near Sloane Square to the family estate at Batsford Park. This, however, he sold a few years later, in 1919, at well below its value. He then built his grand Swinbrook House (“hated by all his children except Deborah”),

which he was later forced to sell along with his precious land.

Downsized to 26 Rutland Gate in Knightsbridge, this became the family's main residence, although for much of the time it was rented out and the family lived behind in the mews. And there was a cottage in Wiltshire. In time, as Baron Redesdale's income declined and his business ventures failed, such upmarket properties were sold until David was left owning Inch Kenneth, a remote grassy island on which was a turreted four story mansion home, to the west of the Isle of Mull,

The outcome for the Mitfords parallels much of the political and social upheaval that came for the West before, during and after the world wars. There was a shift of plates that left the ruling elite at the centre of the British Empire very much swimming in troubled waters. Some swam – some sank. And the heightened political battle between left and right was at the core of much of it. What Thompson also achieves is to develop a context around these divisions prior to World War II making it clear that, until 1938, the fascist versus communist battle was one between two equally nasty extremes.

Among the Mitford sisters, Nancy would tread water with her literary set and early writings, friendship with Evelyn Waugh and other literary giants, but also be dependant on finding a husband before she became tagged as a spinster. She was neither fish nor fowl – unable to embrace the elite bohemia of others like Lytton Strachey and Dora Carrington who hung about her sister Diana's Guinness owned Biddesden where writers came for gatherings. John Betjeman described them as “a sort of Oxford set, we used to see things as an endless party”.

But while Thompson gives weight to the argument that much of the blame for the notorious reputations of the Mitford sisters lay at David's feet, a “reactionary-cum-liberal” a “potent mixture of restraint and freedom” it is still Sydney (who in time would be a rock of support for her most outrageous daughters – Unity and Diana – as they suffered social exile) who takes most of the blame. As Thompson puts it:

It was not David's fault that he had so many daughters, that were bright and mischievous and competitive, that they fought for the attention of a distant mother, that they came of age when the world went mad.

Thompson also seems to excuse David Mitford for losing his hereditary fortune on the grounds that he was “hopeless with money”. Surely the Baron might have used a financial adviser in the interests of his family and heirs. But, in the atmos-

phere of those aristocratic times, David is judged as simply a “big man” with a “theatricality that blossomed when he acquired his inheritance”. Noblesse oblige not at all.

Nancy Mitford caught the attitude sharply in her assessment that David’s forebears too often “regarded their estates with the eyes of sportsmen rather than cultivators” and went on to ask rhetorically whether it had occurred to any of them “to get a job and retrieve the family fortunes?” Her reply of course – “It does not.”

In fact, it was exactly this strong headedness to do as one feels that is so prevalent in many of the Mitford sisters and which is very much like their father’s careless pursuit of imaginary fortune, whether searching (literally) on gold fields or investing in hopelessly thought out schemes to make money. That this spirit prevailed made the Mitfords a sort of mid twentieth century emblem of all that the ruling elite had become at the centre of the British Empire.

That Nancy swam so effortlessly as a writer post-war symbolised the way forward for the rapidly dwindling gentleperson class – professionalism and an earned income, the world of “trade” that had so offended their ilk over centuries would save those who saw the answer. Deborah Mitford, married to Andrew Cavendish, the Duke of Devonshire, would likewise stay afloat. She and her husband would open Chatsworth House to the public and turn it into one of heritage Britain’s most successful businesses.

Experiences around Nancy offered a treasure trove of material for her novels. That four of the six Mitford sisters proved gifted writers also said a lot about informal education and the genes they had inherited. It is not a coincidence that the girls’ maternal grandfather Thomas Gibson-Bowles was a publisher and writer.

Nancy Mitford’s post-war novels became instant bestsellers leaving her extremely comfortable and able to divorce her philandering husband Peter Rodd. She would become the lynchpin of a more socially acceptable Mitford clan. In doing this, as Thompson writes, Nancy Mitford also would “reimagine the family that no longer existed and make it an enduring English myth”.

Nancy’s authorial voice, says Thompson, beginning with *The Pursuit of Love* first published in 1945, would grow “as delightfully familiar as that of Noel Coward, so the word ‘Mitford’ would come to symbolise the World According to Nancy. Charm, ‘creamy English charm’ (in [Evelyn] Waugh’s immortal phrase), would triumph over causes.” Thompson goes on:

... it was her great gift to her family, to distil them into this creed. Of course, it left out other things, as did the novel: *The Pursuit of Love* contains no portrait of Unity, no Diana; war comes to the book, but the wrecking ball of the 1930s does not swing among the Radletts with that same annihilating force. The revolt of the children against parental control is portrayed as a collective act of youthful folly.

Nancy certainly rescued the Mitford name from its legacy of many years of disgrace. For all that, the wayward sisters took their indignities in turn. Unity was brought back from Germany in 1940, with the bullet she had fired still lodged at the back of her head in a place too delicate for it to be removed. She would spend her last years in the care of her mother, incontinent, delusional and an invalid. Her death in 1948 resulted from complications around the dislodged bullet, infection and the remoteness of Inch Kenneth.

Diana withstood the archaic deprivations of Holloway Prison when interned there during the war until released with Mosley in 1943 to house arrest. By the time of their release, Diana was still in her thirties but her health had all but collapsed. Once out of prison, they were pariahs but the Mosely money kept them in some style. Mosely managed to buy the abandoned Crux Easton near Newbury, complete with servants, where they saw out those years of exile in the UK. After the war, Diana re-established herself with Mosely in a charming mini castle in Parisian Orsay – and became part of the social set around the exiled Duke and Duchess of Windsor and many more.

Jessica never moved from her rigid belief in the communist way. After Romilly's death in action during the war Jessica married Robert Treuhaft who likewise was a fervent Communist supporter. In time, buying her sisters out, she would become the sole owner of Inch Kenneth – joking that it might make a good site for a Soviet submarine base. Pamela married, suffered the usual infidelities in marriage but prospered after a financially generous divorce settlement. Deborah kept the Mitford name alive among the aristocracy, marrying the Devonshires' second son and then seeing her husband inherit the title after the death of his brother. She would become as successful as her (quite different) sister Nancy in restoring the Mitford name.

In capturing not only the history of the Mitford sisters but also their spirit and the spirit of their times, Laura Thompson has produced part romp, part empathetic study of a famous family but, above all, a significant contribution to any under-

standing of social and political Britain between the wars.

Anne Henderson is Deputy Director of The Sydney Institute and author of *Menzies at War* - shortlisted for the 2015 Prime Minister's Literary Awards for History

JOHN BLAXLAND'S MORAL EQUIVALENCE HISTORY OF ASIO IN THE 1960S AND EARLY 1970S

The Protest Years – The Official History of ASIO, 1963-1975

By John Blaxland

Allen & Unwin 2015

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Reviewed by Gerard Henderson

John Blaxland's *The Protest Years* is the second in a three-volume series on the history of the Australian Intelligence Security Organisation (ASIO). David Horner's *The Spy Catchers* covered ASIO from its inception in 1949 until 1963. *The Protest Years* deals with the period between 1963 and the demise of the Whitlam Labor government in late 1975. The final volume, also to be written by Dr Blaxland, will cover the period of Malcolm Fraser's government and that of Bob Hawke, until the end of the Cold War in 1989.

The Protest Years is a very important but deeply flawed book. It is long on information but, at times, short on knowledge. The preface to both the "official" histories of ASIO, published so far, contains the following "disclaimer":

Although the vast majority of this book is based on government records, in certain areas the author has drawn on information in publicly available books and articles. It should not be assumed that ASIO has confirmed the veracity of the information sourced from these books and articles.

The disclaimer works for some authors – but not for others. David Horner's *The Spy Catchers* has been widely praised for its attention to detail and considered analysis. *The Protest Years*, on the other hand, contains a number of serious errors which the author is reluctant to acknowledge. (See, for example, correspondence between Gerard Henderson and John Blaxland which was published in the "Correspondence" section of Gerard Henderson's *Media Watch Dog* blog on Friday 29 January 2016 – Issue 301 [here](#)).

And then there is the issue of what "official" means – especially since ASIO has generously funded the authors of the two volumes. In *The Protest Years*, like David Horner before him, John Blaxland writes that it should not be assumed that ASIO has confirmed the veracity of the information sourced from publicly available

books and articles.

So how is this an official history of ASIO – if ASIO will not validate the information in its “official history”? Moreover, with respect to *The Protest Years*, ASIO has provided the “official history” gong to a work which criticises – unfairly – much of ASIO’s work during the years of the Vietnam War.

“ASIO During the Vietnam War, 1963-1972” is the title of Part 1 of *The Protest Years*. Part II is titled “International and Overseas Engagement”, 1963-1975” and Part III “ASIO and the Whitlam Years”. Part 1 of Blaxland’s book is deeply flawed while Part III contains new and important material.

ASIO during the Vietnam War: 1963-1972

The problem with Part I of *The Protest Years* is that John Blaxland has essentially accepted the fashionable left-wing view of ASIO’s role in the 1960s and early 1970s.

For example, at the end of the chapter titled “Grappling with Dissent: Anti-War Protests, 1963-1972”, Blaxland writes:

Many things seem much clearer in hindsight, and this applied equally to ASIO. The period from 1963 to 1972 saw the Organisation devote much of its energy and resources to monitoring and responding to what it called the radical protest movement. But rather than grappling with subversion, ASIO was grappling with dissent and, in the main, failed to draw the distinction. Decades of seeing the communists as the source of their problems left ASIO poorly prepared to make the adjustments necessary to the changing times.

Earlier in the chapter, the author had this to say about the results of a survey which ASIO director-general Sir Charles Spry commissioned in 1968 about the student protest movement:

The results showed that only 7 per cent were foreign-born, indicating the ethnic origin of student protesters did not appear to be an important factor. Nor did the political views of their parents; only a small faction had parents who had previously come to notice through communist affiliations. In addition, the great majority of the students were around 21 years old, “from the middle and upper classes” (where most tertiary education students were drawn from) and some at least were from “particularly well-to-do families”.

Such findings arguably should have triggered a profound reconsideration of the nature of the challenge. Yet instead, ASIO officers were directed to persevere in its established path. Regional officers were exhorted to continue to “make every effort” to identify student protestors and forward the relevant details to headquarters.

Blaxland’s analysis is naïve. In history, many a revolutionary has been young and from a relatively well-to-do family. Blaxland’s conclusion that the 1968 survey findings should have triggered a profound reconsideration of the nature of the security challenge overlooks the fact that many of the young demonstrators worked with organisations of the communist movement, broadly defined. Namely the Communist Party of Australia which up to 1968 was financed by the Soviet Union, the Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist) which was financed by China and the Socialist Party of Australia which in 1971 took over from the CIA as the Australian recipient of Moscow finding.

Indeed there is evidence in *The Protest Years* itself that sections of the protest movement were either controlled by, or heavily influenced by, sections of the communist movement. See, for example Page 170 where Blaxland documents that a demonstration outside the home of prime minister Harold Holt in 1967 was instigated by the Eureka Youth League, a communist front organisation.

It is notable that ASIO’s “official history” is far more critical of the Organisation’s assessments in the 1960s and 1970s than the left itself. In 2014 SBS screened a four-part documentary on ASIO, titled *Persons of Influence*, by leftist film maker Haydn Keenan. As would be expected, *Persons of Influence* was highly critical of ASIO – focusing on its investigations into author and journalist Roger Milliss, student radical Michael Hyde, Aboriginal activist Gary Foley and author Frank Hardy. Only Foley gets a (brief) mention in *The Protest Years*. John Blaxland’s decision to ignore Haydn Keenan’s documentary is a serious error.

According to Blaxland (writing in 2015) ASIO failed to recognise that the Vietnam protest movement was engaged in dissent – not subversion. But this is not what some members of the Vietnam protest movement told Keenan for his documentary (which aired in 2014). Take Michael Hyde, for example, who was the main focus of Part 2 of *Persons of Interest*. Hyde told Haydn:

I became chairman of the Monash University Labor Club which was the most radical organisation in Australia. I helped organise the Vietnam

Moratorium campaigns. I was chairman of the Worker Student Alliance and I was an active leading member of the Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist).

There were many students, but few workers, in the Worker Student Alliance. The important point here is that Hyde boasted about the link between the China financed Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist), the Monash University Labor Club and the Worker Student Alliance. Hyde went on to tell Haydn that in 1968 the Worker Student Alliance aimed to “smash up” and “occupy” the United States Consulate in Melbourne. In 1968, ASIO was correct in anticipating that Hyde and his comrades “planned a violent 4th of July demonstration”. The protest, which was violent enough, was thwarted by Victorian Police. The ASIO document cited here was referred to in *Persons of Influence* but is ignored in *The Protest Years*.

The female student activist Kerry Miller, who was interviewed on *Persons of Interest*, suggested that in 1968 some demonstrators took petrol bombs to the protest with a view to torching the US Consulate.

The once-upon-a-time Monash University student radical Albert Langer (who now goes by the name of Arthur Dent), also appeared on *Persons of Interest*. The program quoted from a contemporary ASIO document which recorded Langer stating that if the race between ASIO and the Worker Student Alliance “was won by the WSA, ASIO operatives and the entire bourgeoisie would be executed”. So in the late 1960s, according to ASIO records, Langer was contemplating executions of the WSA’s opponents. This ASIO document, which is supportive of ASIO’s interpretation of the protest movement at the time, is also overlooked by Blaxland.

Then there is Darce (who also once called himself “Jon”) Cassidy. After his time on the barricades at Monash University with the Worker Student Alliance, Cassidy had a successful career at the ABC. No surprise there.

Like Langer, Cassidy still holds the delusional view that, in the late 1960s, ASIO was intent on murdering members of the Worker Student Alliance. This is what he told *Persons of Interest*:

In fact, that was one of the prime functions of ASIO – to decide who would be taken to the soccer stadium and dealt with. And, you know, I think we held the view that, if there was a revolution, then we’d probably need to do the same sort of thing.

So there you have it. Cassidy told Haydn that, “if there was a revolution”, the

comrades of the Worker Student Alliance would “probably” have murdered their opponents.

All the material in *Persons of Interest* came from ASIO’s files – or from interviews with individuals who were persons of interest to ASIO at the time. Moreover, all the activists quoted above were young 20-somethings and from middle class or well-to-do families. This makes nonsense of Blaxland’s criticism of ASIO that it focused on dissent, not subversion and that young students from well-to-do families were not, by definition, a threat to national security.

The evidence suggests that, in the late 1960s, ASIO was correct in believing that sections of the radical protest movement, who were in receipt of funds from foreign communist powers, were intent on subversion and not just engaging in dissent. Yet *The Protest Years* simply ignores the evidence. ASIO paid good money for poor scholarship in this instance.

ASIO and the Whitlam Years, 1972-1975

By December 1972, when Gough Whitlam was sworn in as prime minister, all Australian combat forces had been withdrawn from Vietnam. While conscription was still a reality, it no longer applied to overseas service since Australian forces were no longer engaged overseas in South East Asia or elsewhere. Whitlam soon withdrew Australia’s few remaining military advisers from South Vietnam and ended conscription. Consequently, by the end of 1972, the Vietnam protest movement no longer had anything much to protest about and was no longer a focus of ASIO’s interest.

The weakness of *The Protest Years* turns on its unfair criticism of ASIO’s take on the Vietnam protest movement in the late 1960s. Its strength turns in the analysis of Gough Whitlam and his senior ministers between December 1972 and November 1975.

The Protest Years provides, unintentionally perhaps, a devastating critique of left-wing heroes Gough Whitlam, Lionel Murphy, Jim (“call me Doctor”) Cairns and more besides. Here’s why.

- On becoming prime minister, Gough Whitlam was unaware that ASIO did not have executive power since it was not a law enforcement agency. In other words, Whitlam was confused about the respective roles of ASIO and the Commonwealth Police Force (now the Australian Federal Police).

- Shortly after becoming prime minister, Gough Whitlam declared that appointees to the staff of Labor ministers were not to be subjected to security checks – including the prime minister’s personal staff. This despite the fact that some were required to handle top secret intelligence material.
- Early on, Attorney-General Lionel Murphy ordered that ASIO no longer conduct surveillance on the Communist Party of Australia, the Communist Party (Marxist- Leninist), the Socialist Party of Australia and Trotskyist organisations. This despite the fact that, in the early 1970s, the CP (M-L) and the SPA were funded by Beijing and Moscow respectively.
- On 15-16 March 1975, Murphy conducted an extraordinary raid on ASIO headquarters in Melbourne – without a warrant. ASIO staff were effectively put under house arrest and were unable to go to their offices or to the toilet. This has not stopped the left praising Murphy’s (alleged) commitment to human rights.
- Whitlam and Murphy subsequently lied when they declared in the Parliament that ASIO director-general Peter Barbour did not complain about the raid.
- As it turned out, Murphy’s justification for the raid – namely, that ASIO had been withholding information about Croatian terrorism in Australia – turned out to be misplaced. No such information was withheld by ASIO.
- Following Murphy’s ASIO raid, Vladimir Petrov (who defected from the Soviet Union Embassy in Canberra in 1954 and was living under a new identity in Melbourne) suffered a severe stroke. Vladimir and Evdokia Petrov were among the most significant defectors from the USSR during the Cold War. Vladimir Petrov became stressed after the raid, believing that the Whitlam government would send him and his wife back to the Soviet Union. Petrov required full-time care until his death in 1991.
- When Whitlam was advised by ASIO that the Soviet Union’s Venona code had been cracked by Western intelligence in the 1950s, the Prime Minister instructed ASIO not to brief Murphy on this matter. Clearly Whitlam did not trust his attorney-general with respect to matters of national security.
- Whitlam instructed ASIO to sever all links with United States’ intelligence agencies. Since Barbour believed that such an order – if implemented – would damage Australia’s national interest, he ignored it. Barbour’s action was

courageous – and proper in the circumstances.

- US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and US Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger were so worried when the leftist Jim Cairns (who was favourable to China) became deputy prime minister in 1974 that they expressed concern that he could attain access to American intelligence. They received advice from Barbour that Cairns had no portfolio responsibilities which would require him to access intelligence documents. This matter was dealt with by ASIO and the relevant departments of the Commonwealth Public Service – not by Whitlam.

- Kep Enderby, who succeeded Murphy as attorney-general in 1975, passed highly classified security material to journalists in Canberra. He subsequently mislaid a secret document which he had used to brief journalists.

There was much praise for the Whitlam government following Gough Whitlam's death in 2014. *The Protest Years* serves as a useful reminder of the incompetence of Whitlam and some of his senior ministers in the area of national security.

Burying the Lead

The Protest Years contains much interesting material along with some fresh insights. Yet sometimes the items of interest are buried in bureaucratic sludge. Take this reference, at Page 44, for example:

The three branches known as BI (Counter-Subversion), B2 (Counter-Espionage) and Q (Special Services) were abolished [in 1970]. Two new branches, B Branch (Research and Analysis) and D Branch (Operations), were created as part of a radical organisational departure from the past and incorporated into the Intelligence Division under FADG (I).

How frightfully interesting, in a bureaucratic kind of way. But here are some real stories buried in the book.

- In 1964 Labor leader Arthur Calwell approached an ASIO officer. According to *The Protest Years*, Calwell told the ASIO officer that he had ignored the Communist Party's penetration of the ALP for years, hoping that it would go away. But communist influence in the Labor Party had now reached a point that he could no longer ignore the problem. Calwell had follow-up meetings with ASIO director-general Spry. In his memoirs *Be Just And Fear Not* (1972), Calwell denied that the Communist Party had infiltrated the ALP and denied that he met

with Spry, beyond chance meetings at airports. *The Protest Years* documents that Calwell was untruthful in his memoirs.

- In 1967, Prime Minister Harold Holt and External Affairs Minister Paul Hasluck rejected a United States request to grant asylum to Svetlana Iosifouna Stalin, the daughter of Soviet dictator Josef Stalin. ASIO was not opposed to granting the request but Holt and Hasluck did not want to upset the Soviet Union and (unnamed) South East Asian countries. This was a weak decision – Svetlana Stalin settled in the US.

- In the 1970s, ASIO received information that the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) was intent on assassinating the Israeli Ambassador in Canberra along with (then) ACTU president Bob Hawke, journalist Sam Lipski and Israel supporter Isi Leibler. *The Protest Years* comments that “in hindsight it appears that ASIO’s work may well have saved the life of a future prime minister of Australia”.

Sure this information came to light when the cabinet papers for 1976 were released in January 2007. Even so, ASIO’s role in preventing these planned assassinations by Black September terrorists deserves more than the scant coverage it receives in *The Protest Years* on Page 384-385.

Postscript – Some Serious Errors

Any book of this size is likely to contain a number of typographical errors, misspellings and the like. However, there are some significant errors to which attention should be drawn.

- As documented in Gerard Henderson’s *Media Watch Dog* blog (Issue 301, 29 January 2016), *The Protest Years* contains a number of errors about B.A. Santamaria, the National Civic Council (commonly termed The Movement) and the Democratic Labor Party. Similar criticisms have been made by Greg Sheridan (in *The Australian*), Professor Ross Fitzgerald (in the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Age*) and Dr Peter Edwards (in *The Weekend Australian*).

- *The Protest Years*, at times, goes over the top in an attempt to balance the case for and against ASIO. For example, at Page 50, the following claim is made:

ASIO has long stood accused of being used as a political tool of government – particularly of conservative governments of the Liberal-Country Party

Coalition, successively led from 1949 to 1972 by Prime Ministers Menzies, Holt, McEwen, Gorton and McMahon. In addition, ASIO has been accused of manipulating the media, some even suggesting that ASIO was seeking to undermine, subvert and frustrate left-wing organisations in Australia, using any weapons it saw fit.

The reference in the final sentence is to “Greg Sheridan and Pat Jacobs, cited in Barnett, *Tale of the Scorpion*, p. 32”. Harvey Barnett was ASIO director-general between 1981 and 1985. Pat Jacobs was the nom de plume for Andrew Campbell. The fact is that neither Sheridan nor Campbell criticised ASIO for attempting to subvert left-wing organisations in Australia. *The Protest Years* does not provide a primary source for this claim and the secondary source, Harvey Barnett’s *Tale of the Scorpion*, does not support the claim.

In fact, according to Barnett (who quoted no source) Sheridan and Jacobs criticised ASIO for not devoting sufficient resources to subverting left-wing organisations. In other words, Blaxland’s interpretation is hopelessly wrong. But this assertion is damaging to ASIO, since it falsely implies that even anti-communists like Sheridan and Jacobs/Campbell criticised the Organisation for being too obsessed with the protest movement.

- *The Protest Years* contains many fine photographs. Pity about one of the captions. The caption at the bottom of the photo of Victorian Liberal Party Senator Ivor Greenwood reads as follows:

Ivor Greenwood, 1971, Attorney-General in 1971-72..., he believed Croatian extremists need not trouble ASIO.

This statement is false – according to Blaxland’s own research. Page 153 of *The Protest Years* contains the following comment re Senator Greenwood’s attitude to Croatian extremism in the early 1970s when he was attorney-general:

Meanwhile, on 29 September [1972] Greenwood circulated a Cabinet submission on terrorism and violence in Australia, which indicated that he was in fact taking the threat from within the “Yugoslav migrant community” more seriously than Whitlam alleged.

The Protest Years then quotes from Ivor Greenwood’s October 1972 submission, which read as follows:

There are allegations that Croat migrants have committed acts of terrorism in Australia. There have been proven instances of Yugoslav-born persons being found in possession of explosives. There are counter-allegations of terrorism against Croat migrants in Australia and of the use of agent provocateurs. It is also said that Yugoslav secret police are active in Australia.

Then, on Page 155, John Blaxland wrote:

Greenwood accepted the view that the greatest threat of terrorism came from the Croatians. Whitlam's comment that Greenwood maintained that there was "no credible evidence" of Croatian terrorism and that he "rejected the advice of his department" about it is not supported by the statements in Greenwood's Cabinet submission.

So, according to the analysis in *The Protest Years*, the caption to Ivor Greenwood's photograph in *The Protest Years* is wrong. Misleadingly wrong – and quite unfair to the late Ivor Greenwood who is not around to defend himself. How can this have come about? Either Dr Blaxland did not know what was in the captions – or the caption writer did not know what was in Dr Blaxland's book. Some mistake, surely.

W.J. (Bill) Brown – the father of Greens' Senator Lee Rhiannon – was one of Australia's life-long Stalinists. He left the Communist Party of Australia after it broke with Moscow over the Soviet Union's invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. In 1986 W.J. Brown's *The Communist Movement and Australia: An Historical Outline – 1990s to 1980s* was published – it is cited in *The Protest Years*.

Bill Brown and his wife Freda Brown were well known communists. Yet, in *The Protest Years*, W.J. (Bill) Brown is referred to as "Wilton Brown". However, in *The Spy Catchers*, David Horner refers to Bill Brown – who is identified as W.J. Brown in the index. It is reasonable to expect that the author of *The Protest Years* should get W.J. Brown's first name correct – especially since *The Communist Movement in Australia* is cited in the book's bibliography.

Conclusion – On Moral Equivalence and All That

Despite the valuable material in *The Protest Years*, the second volume of the official history of ASIO is marred by the tone of moral equivalence. This is evident early in the book where Blaxland wrote:

[ASIO] Staff members were expected to be selfless out of a sense of patriotism to the nation and loyalty to the Organisation. For instance, officers could be tasked to operate a static observation post at Sydney's Kings Cross throughout the night and be expected to report for work at the office the next morning, or follow a group of Russians visiting Sydney from Canberra for the weekend while working Monday to Friday and also meeting agents three nights a week.

ASIO employees also faced other damages and hardships. Publicity and harassment, for instance, arising from the actions of irresponsible or extremist individuals, generated considerable stress for ASIO staff and their families, (although the same could be said of those people being targeted). Similarly for those tasked to undertake operational work on groups or organisations likely to resort to violence, the experience generated considerable stresses.

John Blaxland is asking his readers to compare the plight of ASIO officials who worked long hours without overtime (or days off in lieu of overtime) with the situation of individuals who were being targeted by ASIO. Many of the latter proclaimed the need for revolution at home while they benefited from the financial support of such communist dictatorships as the Soviet Union, other Eastern Europe nations and China. What's more, Blaxland cites no evidence for his claim that ASIO officers harassed members of the protest movement or publicised their activities.

However, as documented in *The Protest Years*, law abiding ASIO officers were stalked by the so-called Committee for the Abolition of Political Police, led by Victorian left activist Joan Coxside. One ASIO officer's house, in the Melbourne suburb of McKinnon, was identified by a CAPP initiated letter box drop – subsequently rocks were thrown through his front window, narrowly missing a child.

Coxside and her comrades subsequently demonstrated outside ASIO director-general Peter Barbour's house in Melbourne when it went up for auction. Coxside and her comrade Ponchita Hawkes – who are subjected to an extraordinary four photographs in *The Protest Years* – subsequently confronted an ASIO officer in an office lift and called him a "fascist bastard". On another occasion, a group of CAPP activists terrified a number of female ASIO employees who were attempting to enter their workplace.

As *The Protest Years* documents, in the 1960s and 1970s, ASIO officers received modest pay and experienced modest conditions. Joan Coxsedg, a hero of the Socialist Left in Victoria, went on to receive a generous taxpayer funded superannuation per courtesy of her election to the Victorian Legislative Counsel in 1979 following winning an ALP pre-selection – thanks to her fellow comrades in the Victorian Socialist Left faction.

And John Blaxland, in the second volume of ASIO’s “official history”, asks us to accept that the stress experienced by ASIO staff at the hands of CAPP was comparable to that of those individuals who were targeted – discretely – by ASIO. What a load of tosh.

Dr Gerard Henderson is executive director of The Sydney Institute, a columnist with the Weekend Australian and author (most recently) of Santamaria – A Most Unusual Man (MP 2015)

EVIDENCE, MEMORY AND THE DISMISSAL

The Dismissal: In The Queen's Name

by Paul Kelly and Troy Bramston

Viking, 2015

ISBN: 978 0 670 07920 9

RRP: \$39.99

The Dismissal: Where were you on November 11, 1975?

by Sybil Nolan

MUP, 2005, second edition 2015

ISBN: 0 522 85199 1

RRP:\$ 29.99

The Dismissal Dossier: Everything you were never meant to know about November 1975

by Jenny Hocking

MUP, 2015

ISBN: 978 0 522 86918 7

RRP: \$ 16.99

Reviewed by Gerard Henderson

Not much has happened in Australian national politics since Federation in 1901. No war of independence, no civil war, no political assassinations. It's been relatively quiet on the political home front – except for Governor-General Sir John Kerr's decision to dismiss Gough Whitlam's Labor government on 11 November 1975. Liberal Party leader Malcolm Fraser was commissioned to head a caretaker government pending a double dissolution election on 13 December 1975 – which the Coalition won with the biggest majority in the modern era.

So it came as no surprise that the fortieth anniversary of The Dismissal saw the publication of two new books – one by journalists Paul Kelly and Troy Bramston and one by academic Jenny Hocking. A collection of essays edited by journalist Sybil Nolan on the thirtieth anniversary was re-published with a new foreword.

Paul Kelly and Troy Bramston have been admirers of Gough Whitlam – albeit not uncritical ones. *The Dismissal: In The Queen's Name* is critical of the three key players in the event – but the authors maintain that the final responsibility for the outcome can rest only with Kerr as governor-general. This substantial, and well researched book, is a credit to two journalists who have busy day jobs at *The Australian*.

Jenny Hocking is an academic who has not worked in, or near, government. In recent decades, she has become the taxpayer funded biographer of such leftist heroes as Gough Whitlam (two volumes), Lionel Murphy and Frank Hardy. Dr Hocking has carried the flag for the Whitlam government over the years – following Whitlam's evocation of four decades ago that his supporters should “maintain the rage” against The Dismissal.

And then there is Sybil Nolan. Her edited collection *The Dismissal: Where were you on November 11, 1975?* is the fairest account of The Dismissal since it presents a plurality of views. In his chapter in this collection, Gerard Henderson cited a letter published in *The Age* on 4 December 1975 by Hugo Wolfsohn (a professor of politics at La Trobe University) and Rufus Davis (a professor of politics at Monash University). Both men were Jewish Australians of European background who knew a crisis when they saw one. In their letter, Wolfsohn/Davis hit out at the left's hyperbolic stand taken on The Dismissal:

We wish to express concern about current pronouncements by academics in the newspapers, as media commentators or authors of handbills and pamphlets circulating in tertiary institutions. Alarming statements about a “crisis in Australian democracy”, the “end of Australian democracy” abound, not to mention the more dramatic allegations of a “coup d'état” by the Governor-General and the comparisons with Chile and the rise of Hitler.

Australian democracy is neither in crisis nor has it come to an end. Coups d'état are not usually followed by elections and the learned comparisons with Chile and Nazi Germany, offered by “professional” historians and other “experts”, would be merely comic were it not for the fact that these people are occupying responsible teaching positions in our universities.

The good news is that practical commentators like Kelly and Bramston have come to accept this view. In the Epilogue of *The Dismissal: In The Queen's Name* they write:

Contrary to many dire predictions, the political, parliamentary and constitutional system recovered and proved its resilience. None of the major powers exercised has been cancelled. The Senate can still block or reject supply bills. The governor-general can still dismiss a prime minister. A High Court chief justice can still furnish the governor-general with advisory opinion.

In other words, as Wolfsohn and Davis predicted, The Dismissal did not result in a crisis in Australian democracy. The Coalition won the early election of December 1975 – which had the effect of cutting Labor’s expected term of office by about 18 months (since Labor would surely have lost the election scheduled for around May 1977). Labor, under Bob Hawke’s leadership, was back in office by March 1983 – thus restoring the normal political balance in Australia.

While Kelly/Bramston have accepted that Australia’s political system survived the shock of 11 November 1975, Dr Hocking – from the bowels of Monash University and with the support of many taxpayer funded handouts from the Australian Research Council – is still maintaining the rage. Her latest book contains a hyperbolic endorsement by author Anna Funder:

The Dismissal Dossier is shocking, compelling, and profoundly important. It is a constitutional horror story, in which democratic process is the victim, and the perpetrators got away with it. Jenny Hocking’s impressive research and analysis should dispel a forty-year fiction perpetrated on the Australian public: that the Prime Minister didn’t have a political solution, and that Sir John Kerr acted alone. Instead, Kerr acted with the foreknowledge and implied consent of the Queen, and in concert with the Chief Justice of the High Court of Australia, another High Court Judge and the Leader of the Opposition to oust a democratically elected government. That these actors in the drama were able to conceal the true history is shocking. Hocking’s book is an important reminder about the vulnerability of democratic process, a revelatory account of the events of 1975 and, hopefully, a wise contribution for when we draft the constitution of the Republic of Australia.

Anne Funder writes fine novels. But she is out of her depth when it comes to Australian political history. In fact, there is nothing new in *The Dismissal Dossier* – which is only to be expected since the matter has been researched and written about for four decades. As Kelly/Bramston document, there is no evidence that The Dismissal had the consent of Elizabeth II – implied or otherwise. Nor is there

anything new in the comment that the then Chief Justice Sir Garfield Barwick and the then High Court Justice Sir Anthony Mason advised Kerr about The Dismissal.

In her introduction, titled “Uncovering A Hidden History”, Hocking makes the following comment about her earlier book *Gough Whitlam: His Time*.

The revelation about the role of Sir Anthony Mason, first published in *Gough Whitlam: His Time* in 2012, was just one of several defining aspects of the dismissal of the Whitlam government that had been variously overlooked, concealed, or simply forgotten as the history took shape. A powerful mix of political imperative, historical amnesia and deliberate distortion had generated lasting confusion and ignorance about some of the most critical elements. Without them, our knowledge and understanding of the dismissal remains incomplete.

This is simply incorrect. As Kelly/Bramston acknowledge:

It was Sir Garfield Barwick who first revealed Mason had a role in the dismissal in an interview with Bruce Donald on the ABC in January 1994. Gerard Henderson soon after disclosed that Kerr had told him some years earlier than he had sought Mason’s advice prior to the dismissal, and that they had engaged directly.

Sir Anthony Mason’s involvement in The Dismissal was first revealed by Gerard Henderson in an article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 8 January 1994 – over two decades ago. It is true that full details were not exposed until Jenny Hocking reported in detail on the Kerr Papers, which were deposited in the National Archives of Australia. But Henderson did point out in his *SMH* column that Kerr regarded Mason’s advice as more significant than that professed by Barwick. So Hocking’s claim in *The Dismissal Dossier* that in 1994 Mason’s role was still seen as “relatively minor” before the publication of her book *Gough Whitlam: His Time* simply does not stand up.

It seems that leftist academics like Hocking did not take up the story about Mason two decades ago because he was regarded as a progressive chief justice presiding over a progressive High Court – who was much admired by Gough Whitlam, among others.

The Dismissal Dossier is a naïve book. Hocking seems unaware that some

politicians – like some academics – do not tell the truth. Moreover some politicians – like some academics – have memories of events that never happened.

In building her case against Sir John Kerr, Hocking is prepared to accept the accounts/recollections of everyone who is useful to her thesis – despite the lack of supporting evidence. It is widely known that former Liberal Party prime minister Malcolm Fraser and William McMahon were consistently untruthful.

Yet Hocking accepts, without question, what Fraser told one-time Labor front bencher Clyde Cameron in an interview conducted for the National Library of Australia in 1987. She also accepts what Liberal Senator Reg Withers (who fell out with Fraser) told Cameron about Fraser and Kerr in 1995. Interviews given on the understanding that they will not be made public until after the interviewee's death are worthless as historical accounts – since there is no way of subjecting the person concerned to cross-examination. Both Fraser and Withers spoke to Cameron many years after 1975 – and Fraser always acknowledged his memory was “notoriously fallible”.

Also, Hocking accepts what the notoriously untruthful McMahon said in 1979 that he told Kerr in 1975. Again, this is useless – since there is no evidence to support McMahon's account.

The point of the Fraser and Withers quotes was to support Hocking's case that Kerr tipped off Fraser in advance of his intentions to dismiss Whitlam. The point of the McMahon reference was to indicate that there was opposition to blocking supply within the Liberal Party room.

The truth is that Hocking believes what she wants to believe. Even to the extent, at times, of even making things up. For example, Hocking refers to an “elaborate lunch” which Kerr and Barwick had at Admiralty House on 10 November 1975. How does she know it was elaborate?

Then Hocking asserts that, on the day of The Dismissal, Kerr “drank gin and tonic” before lunch and “consumed large amounts of alcohol” at lunch. She then describes him as “obviously drunk”. It is not at all clear who this was obvious to. No one else has made this claim.

Certainly Kerr's performance during the afternoon of 11 November 1975 indicates that he was well in control of his faculties – and much more focused on the task at hand than Whitlam. For the record, Hocking's “evidence” of Kerr's

alleged drunkenness on 11 November 1975 is based on the recall of a guest at the lunch some four decades after the event. It's surprising that the Australian Research Council so readily funds this kind of "research".

Unlike *The Dismissal Dossier*, *The Dismissal: In The Queen's Name* contains considerable evidence. Certainly Kerr is held primarily responsible for the events of 11 November 1975. Yet it is possible to read this book and come to another conclusion. Namely that what occurred in late 1975 was that an arrogant and determined Fraser was intent on blocking supply and an arrogant and determined Whitlam was intent on governing without supply. The Governor-General was the only person capable of resolving this deadlock – and he did.

While Kelly-Bramston carefully weigh all the evidence, there is still a level of naivety involved in their assessment. Take, for example, the nature of the phone call which took place between Kerr and Whitlam on the morning of 11 November 1975.

Kerr always maintained that he merely called Fraser to check if the Opposition was still intent on blocking supply and that Fraser replied in the affirmative. Initially Fraser supported Kerr's account – which is supported by Kerr's contemporaneous record dated 16 November 1975. However, Fraser told Philip Adams for his book *Fraser: A Biography*, which was published in 1987, that Kerr effectively tipped him off Whitlam's pending dismissal by asking him whether he would accept certain conditions for presiding over a caretaker government.

Kerr always maintained that the conditions were put to Fraser at a meeting at Government House, later that day, after Whitlam had been dismissed. Kelly/Bramston put it this way:

Kerr may have a note dated 16 November [1975] but Fraser had a note dated 11 November [1975], made at the time of the call, verified by several witnesses.

But did he? Even a brief glance of the note – which Fraser said in the 1980s he had mislaid but which he recovered sometime in the early 2000s – indicates that the writing at the top of the note is dramatically different from that at the bottom of the note. Indeed it seems that when dating the note Fraser wrote a "7" over an "8" – suggesting that he first dated the note "1985" but corrected it to "1975". It's quite possible that Fraser dated the note in 1985, ten years after the event. Fraser was certainly capable of back-dating a document. The note, which is published

in *The Dismissal: In The Queen's Name*, is reproduced below. At the very least, Fraser's note should be subjected to a forensic examination before it is accepted at face value.

Kelly/Bramston also show signs of naivety by accepting the post-mortem testimonies of both Withers and Fraser and also accepting without question the veracity of a statutory declaration made by Fraser in 2006 about events of 1975 but not released until after his death. This is worthless "evidence" since it relies on the recall of a man who declared that he had a bad memory and who issued a statutory declaration which was released after his death when there could be no penalty for swearing false evidence.

In any event, both Kelly/Bramston and Hocking misunderstand this matter. Kerr had no reason to assure himself that Fraser would accept his conditions for presiding over a caretaker government, pending an election – since Fraser had no option. Having railed for over a month that Whitlam should advise an election or be dismissed, Fraser would have been a ridiculous figure if he rejected the governor-general's terms of appointment as caretaker prime minister pending a double dissolution election.

The problem which Kerr experienced is that Fraser turned against him sometime after he ceased being prime minister. This meant that both Whitlam and Fraser attempted to discredit Kerr – albeit for different reasons – and that both lived for over two decades beyond Kerr, who died in 1991.

Unlike Jenny Hocking, Paul Kelly and Troy Bramston have written a scholarly book. But they overlook the fact that, according to the extant evidence, only John Kerr and Garfield Barwick left contemporaneous notes about their involvement in *The Dismissal*. Kelly/Bramston rely on the recall of Fraser and Withers and Liberal MP Vic Garland along with that of Fraser staffers David Kemp and Dale Budd. All this group, living or dead, left memories but not contemporaneous notes. The same appears to be the case with respect to Sir Anthony Mason. Memory is a very unreliable historical tool.

That's why it is intriguing that so many commentators – including Kelly/Bramston and Hocking – have ignored Anton Hermann's *Alan Missen: Liberal Pilgrim* (Poplar Press, 1993). But it is quoted in Sybil Nolan's edited collection.

The Victorian Liberal Alan Missen was the senator most likely to lead a revolt in the upper house over Malcolm Fraser's determination to block supply. Missen

– unlike Fraser or Withers or Garland or Kemp or Budd – left a diary note. It reveals that Missen had no intention of crossing the floor in the Senate to support the passing of supply unless a solid core of colleagues were prepared to support him. In his contemporaneous diary note – dated 14 October 1975 – Missen wrote that “nobody” would do so.

In other words, Fraser would hold the Opposition’s numbers in the Senate. Meanwhile Whitlam had no intention of backing down in the House of Representatives. Kerr understood the reality – and acted to resolve the deadlock. But he did not strike the first, or even the retaliatory blow.

In recent years Dr Paul Kelly, Troy Bramston and Dr Jenny Hocking have brought new material to the debate about The Dismissal. Some of it contemporaneous and, consequently, fresh. Some of it based on the recollections of players decades after the event and, consequently, unreliable. The most important revelation in the recent books is the documentation in Kelly/Bramston that in December 1975 Gough Whitlam wrote to British prime minister Harold Wilson saying that he would have got the Queen to remove John Kerr as governor-general had he been aware of Kerr’s intention to dismiss him as prime minister. This confirms Kerr’s belief at the time.

However, there has been no compelling challenge to the contemporaneous account left by Sir John Kerr in *Matters of Judgement: An Autobiography* (Macmillan, 1978) and the monograph and book by Sir Garfield Barwick respectively titled *Sir John did his Duty* (Serendip Publications, 1983) and *A Radical Tory* (Federation Press, 1995).

All that is absent from Kerr’s autobiography was the identity of “the only person other than the Chief Justice” whom he consulted before The Dismissal. Sir Anthony Mason was revealed as “the person” in January 1994, shortly after Kerr’s death. Clearly Kerr did not want to out Mason while he was still on the High Court with prospects of becoming Chief Justice.

No doubt more will be written about 11 November 1975. But the new accounts are unlikely to change the story as it was understood four decades ago.

Dr Gerard Henderson is executive director of The Sydney Institute, a columnist with the Weekend Australian and author (most recently) of Santamaria – A Most Unusual Man (MP 2015)

JASPER JONES

Jasper Jones by Kate Mulvany (novel by Craig Silvey)

Directed by Anne-Louise Sarkis

Cast: Tom Conroy, Kate Mulvany, Matilda Ridgway, Steve Rodgers, Guy Simon, Charles Wu

At Belvoir St Theatre

January 2 – February 7, 2016

Reviewed By Nathan Lentern

Cast: Tom Conroy, Kate Mulvany, Matilda Ridgway, Steve Rodgers, Guy Simon, Charles Wu

Based on the 2009 novel by Craig Silvey, which in turn seems inspired by the real life events concerning the trial of Max Stuart, Jasper Jones tells the story of an Aboriginal teenager suspected of murdering a white girl. Over the course of two hours, we join him on his gruelling journey as he navigates his way through the court of public opinion, with the erratic

“Mad” Jack Lionel taking up the cudgels as prosecutor in chief.

Bespectacled and bookish, fourteen year old Charlie Bucktin prefers living in the pages of his novels until the besieged Jasper turns to Charlie for aid. Together the two, along with Jeffrey, the son of Vietnamese immigrants - forge a powerful and enduring friendship that serves as a bulwark against the trio’s challenges.

Though in his mid-twenties, Tom Conroy produces a bravura performance as the 14-year old Charlie. Some well-chosen costumes and hair styles, combined with his silky acting, easily allow us to suspend our disbelief as we’re touched and moved by Charlie’s personal growth through the bonds of friendship.

Charles Wu as Jeffrey is similarly likeable and engaging, blending a dry wit with a childlike belief in the ultimate triumph of fairness.

Guy Simon as Jasper gives a more emotional and distraught performance. This is after all to be expected of the character who has the most at stake and we feel his suffering as his attempts to mask his fear behind a cloak of machismo become ever feebler. Which brings me to the biggest problem with the play.

Director Anne Louise-Sarkis utilises her resources efficiently to produce a thoroughly engrossing product for at an unpretentious price and location. Jasper Jones is funny, there is an eclectic range of terrific witticisms adroitly delivered and some really outstanding slapstick. There is also no shortage of heart wrenching and heart-warming moments as the triangular friendship ferments and accrues huge emotional poignancy and yet something doesn't quite stack up.

All of this is delightful, but a girl is dead and a wrongly accused Indigenous man has a lynch mob after him. The gravity of this salient plot point feels like it should eclipse these secondary plots but, instead, at times it feels almost forgotten. The touching tale of male friendship, although beautiful, feels like a stand-alone, separate production.

There are also a few clumsily executed moments, most of which stem from ambitious attempts to incorporate the off-stage area into the performance. That is to say, where actors wade into the aisles. Nervous stumbling aside, I'm generally not a fan of this technique. A palpable tingle of anxiety sweeps through the theatre as the shrinking violets of audience shrink in their seats, hoping not to be dragged into the performance. If opening night was anything to go by the actors find the experience similarly unpleasant. Back on stage and in their comfort zone, however, the cast are nigh upon faultless.

It's a pleasant night out. You'll enjoy plenty of laughs and feel genuine sympathy for our protagonists but there is still something a little unsatisfying about Jasper Jones.

Somehow the emotional tug just isn't big enough for a play about something this serious.

Nathan Lentern is a writer and performer.

AN ALLEGORY FOR MODERN RELATIONSHIPS

The Lobster

Release Date: 11 March 2016

Director: Yorgos Lanthimos

Writers: Yorgos Lanthimos, Efthymis Filippou

Starring: Colin Farrell, Rachel Weisz, Olivia Colman

Reviewed by Paige Hally

The Lobster is Greek auteur Yorgos Lanthimos' latest absurdist offering and his first English language film.

Set in a not too distant dystopian future where coupledom is valued so highly that being single is outlawed, the recently divorced David (Colin Farrell) is taken to a resort where he faces a choice - find a partner within 45 days or be turned into an animal of his choosing. In David's case, a lobster. Manager of the resort (Olivia Colman) is impressed with David for making an imaginative choice, unlike most other residents, who favour canines. "This is why the world is full of dogs," she comments.

Those who reject this bizarre system - known as "loners" - are forced to live in the woods, with residents of the hotel being rewarded with an extended stay for hunting them down.

David spends his days at the hotel half-heartedly trying to force connections with other residents. He considers his prospects of finding a partner so bleak that he resorts to pretending to be a sociopath in an attempt to impress the hotel's resident psychopath. When the lengths she'll go to, in order to catch him out in his lie, prove too much and his days as a human are numbered, David flees to the woods, falling in with a militant opposition group.

However, life outside the mainstream system is just as unforgiving. As David forms a relationship with a fellow short-sighted loner (Rachel Weisz) the militant group's rules against any form of romantic interaction are just as oppressive as those of the hotel.

Shot predominantly on the Irish coastline, the film's sombre colour palette and

bleak production design match the film's emotional tone and reflect the oppressive world the characters inhabit, as does the formal framing of Thimios Bakatakis' cinematography. The jagged, brittle score is comprised of classical music lending the film an unrelenting sense of menace.

While dark and on occasion violent, the film is still funny, with many moments of bizarre humour coming from the performances, the highly absurd premise and the increasingly exotic animals that occupy the background. As well as Rachel Weisz and Colin Farrell, the cast includes its fair share of comedic actors, including British comedy staples Olivia Colman and Ashley Jensen, as well as John C Reilly.

In the world of *The Lobster*, romantic compatibility between the characters is determined by shared disabilities or shortcomings. With characters drawn together by traits like frequent nosebleeds a limp or shortsightedness, Lanthimos creates an allegory for modern relationships - the snap judgements of online dating and the societal pressure to be in a relationship.

If the film falters anywhere it's in the structure and pacing. The first and third acts feel somewhat disjointed. However, the sharp, engaging script and unique premise is thought provoking enough to engage until the end of the film.

Over all, Lanthimos has created an off-beat, poignant love story that examines modern relationships, conformity and detachment.

Paige Hally is completing a Masters in Media Arts and Production

THEY'VE ALREADY WON

They've Already Won by Harriet Gillies and Pierce Wilcox

At Belvoir St Theatre (Surry Hills NSW)

December 8 – December 20, 2015

Reviewed By Nathan Lentern

They've Already Won is, in a word, fresh. Packed full of cutting edge online parlance and contemporary discussions, you feel sure that the cast must have been updating their scripts right up until opening night and maybe even after. Which they could well have done. The production was written, directed and performed by duo Harriet Gillies and Pierce Wilcox which means of course, no interpretation.

The doubling up on roles, or tripling up in this instance, can be a dangerous approach. The absence of fresh eyes and perspectives can lead to some pretty debilitating tunnel vision but in this case you suspect a filtering influence would have weakened its emotional potency. For emotionally potent it more certainly is.

Through an array of innovative invocations of multimedia technology and unhealthy doses of sardonic wit the pair manage to keep the impending sense of nihilistic despair at bay for a while but can only delay it for so long. As the title of the show suggests: the conclusion is long foregone.

They've Already Won explores takes on the fears and anxieties of the 21st century: climate change, terrorism, food shortages, with an overarching, greater anxiety about our intellectual capacity to deal with them. The role of Clickbait and internet fads, whether through BuzzFeed Listicles, Youtube videos about cats or internet arguments conducted in the language of meme eroding our capacity to communicate and even think in a nuanced and sophisticated way forms the dominant message of this 60 minute play. Our despairing protagonists are left fearful that the stupefying influence of New Media is leaving them weak and vulnerable to external threats, at a time in which they are told these threats are more existential than at any time in post war history.

The wit and generality of the play is such that older audiences are more than capable of enjoying it, but it is ultimately a product that speaks to millennials. A gen-

eration for whom living in a dystopic future where the broadsheet newspaper has passed from living memory and BuzzFeed chooses is a probable outcome.

There are moments which fall flatter than others, but this is the natural trade-off for so ambitious and unconventional a production. The dividend for taking such risks is an audience witnessing some truly trailblazing cinema years before it is normalised and robbed of its edge.

Gillies and Willcox are talented and engaging for the duration. The pair of young NIDA graduates with startling impressive resumes are clearly blessed with deep reserves of talents which we may only have leads to long, prolifically careers.

Yet it is the skill with which the pair satirically embrace the Twitterverse's lexicon ought to be singled out for praise. The artful synthesis of memes, catchphrases and acronyms combines to achieve a kind of genius gibberish that are at the same time both hilarious and deeply sinister, evoking comparisons with Anthony Burgess' "A Clockwork Orange."

All in all it's something of an acquired taste but the arts are well served by ambitious, cutting edge productions like this. And for a certain type of anxious millennial it is likely the very thing they've for which they've been holding out.

Nathan Lentern is a writer and performer.

STAR WARS OR STAR TREK

The Force Awakens

Directed by J J Abrams

Produced by Kathleen Kennedy & J J Abrams

Written by Lawrence Kasdan, Bryan Burk & Michael Arndt

Reviewed by Dimitri Burshtein

A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away well, not that far away and not that long ago.

It's here. It's out. It's time. Not for the second coming of Gough, but for the seventh coming of Star Wars, this time titled *The Force Awakens*.

After a 10 year hiatus, the latest instalment of the Star Wars family of movies has arrived. But this time, it's different. Having sold the Star Wars (and Lucasfilm) franchise to Disney in 2012, George Lucas walked away with a cool US\$4 billion.

While Lucas got the cash, the rest of us got the benefit of the Disney movie making machine to make episodes 7, 8 and 9 of the Star Wars series. For this movie and at least the next, Disney engaged J.J. Abrams to write and direct. Abrams is also the man behind the latest Star Trek movies giving him the opportunity to be on both sides of the star debate – Star Wars or Star Trek.

Lucas' most recent Star Wars movies, the prequel episodes 1, 2 and 3, were poorly received – too many characters, over reliance on special effects and terrible acting, especially by Hayden Christensen as Anakin Skywalker. The movies could have been described as fundraisers. In contrast, in episode 7, Abrams tells a very tight story and does not over rely on special effects. Tellingly, there are also fewer characters with the initial focus on Rey a scavenger, Finn a deserter storm trooper and Kylo Ren the bad guy powered by the Dark Side.

To be fair to Lucas, Abrahams had the benefit of a contiguous six prior movies without the need to reverse engineer his story. This allowed him to recruit Mark Hamill (Luke Skywalker), Carrie Fisher (Leia Organa) and Harrison Ford (Han Solo) to take roles in this movie. Yes, they were some 30 years older, greyer and “rounder”, but they were still Luke, Leia and Han. But the sense of nostalgia harking back to the original three movies was not a fault. It was a feature.

The Force Awakens is set some years after the Return of the Jedi – where Darth Vader/Anakin Skywalker died and Luke Skywalker brought balance back to the force. There is again a battle for freedom and justice with a reconstituted Galactic Republic called the First Order and the ever reliable Rebel Alliance.

For economic as much as spiritual reasons, it is important that this movie is a success. Following the poorly received prequels, a Star Wars counter narrative was given birth; that the Empire/Republic were the “good guys” seeking to maintain galactic law and order and the Jedi the were “bad guys”, a crypto-religious cult. Although perhaps not by deliberate design, hopefully The Force Awakens puts to bed this narrative.

The Jedi-bad-guys counter-narrative emerged in 2002 via the pen of Jonathan V. Last. Last’s thesis was that the Empire, for all of its failings, was a democratically elected government seeking to engender inter-planetary peace, stability and commerce. The Jedi, on the other hand, were an “arrogant royalist Swiss Guard” with theocratic tendencies who heard voices (the Force).

Last’s criticism of the Jedi extended to their keeping of slaves, the droids R2D2, C3P0 and BB8, and their preference for extra-judicial executions. The latter being demonstrated in the Revenge of the Sith, when Mace Windu was trying to kill Palpatine. Upon witnessing this, Anakin Skywalker implored Windu that Palpatine must stand trial but Windu replied “he (Palpatine) has control of the senate and all the courts. He is too dangerous to be left alive”.

The Force Awakens is a wonderful redemption. It stands on its own feet and one does not need to see the prior Star Wars films to enjoy and appreciate it. But as a member of the Star Wars family, it will break box office records. There is no wonder that Disney has indicated that they will keep making Star Wars movies as long as people keep paying to see them.

To be honest, I was not very excited about the prospects of this instalment, but it was so good, I am desperately looking forward to the next two. For a final rating, I will defer to the words of my 8 year old son who rated the film as a great. My 10 year old gave it a shy thumbs up, and it takes a lot to get a thumb up from him!

Star Wars Episode 8 is scheduled for 2017. With the Force having awoken, what will happen next?