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Abstract

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LYN JACOBS

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(*Silences Long Gone* 10)

Australia's imagining and imaging of nationhood and identity, the construction and modification of its sense of itself, home and away, has been a crucial focus of its literature. From nationalist redefinitions of Europhile exilic trauma to post-colonial realignments of geographic, political and cultural vectors, this activity has kept writers employed since invasion. In contemporary times, symbolic and 'imaginary homelands' have competed with a regional focus on migrancy and relocation to re-define transnational and local cultural imperatives. Focussing on topical and terminal disorders, Anson Cameron's two novels, *Silences Long Gone* and *Tin Toys*, scrutinise Australian social, political and aesthetic conditions. His targets are sometimes off-shore, like multi-national companies, but their local influence is regrettably familiar. Embracing satire, farce, tragedy and pathos, these funny, bleak fictions relentlessly tackle crucial issues and force us to ask how far 'past the post' is post-colonial in this country?

Silences Long Gone replies to Joseph Furphy's *Such is Life* but the cast — Indigenes, an aged woman, a beach and mining community and an odd assortment of misfits — were not encountered by Tom Collins, that myopic, misguided itinerant-worker and diarist.¹ While *Such is Life*'s chaotic events exposed the limitations of Anglophile accounts of early Australian life, Cameron's novels subvert more recent national inscriptions.² However, as in *Such is Life*, the scriptors compete for ownership of the tale (this narrator is pursued by a professional writer intent on capturing the whole sad story in his powerbook to present it 'realistically') but this contemporary picaresque shadows even darker tales of exploitation and loss.

The novel is about several deaths: of a mining town doomed by dodgy political and corporate dealings over an Indigenous site; of a resolute, aged white woman, Belle (and several members of her family) resisting eviction from her home in the Pilbara; and of Belle's unlikely saviour, the inscrutable surfer, Thaw. This

narrator, Jack Furphy, Australian prodigal son, is not 'unemployed' but is a real estate agent, currently under different company orders to persuade his mother to leave her particular sacred site: 'They are flying me across the country to fight a hag' he blithely remarks, as he sees his dismantled childhood iron-mining town being trucked out in an enforced exodus:

The whole town, all its timber parts and all its tin parts and all its fibro parts, which is nearly all its parts, is driving south towards permanent green, to become outskirts of sandstone and brick towns with reasons to live. (5)

This radical case of *home and away* scrutinises, and problematises personal and public sites and emotional and economic investments. While this trope is a familiar one in assessments of national identity, in Cameron's *schema* people are held to ransom rather than account in the spectrum of Australian social and political rights being interrogated.

WAITING: NOT WAVING

The entire town of Hannah, which as the above quote indicates was never 'real', now exists *in absentia*:

Either side of the red earth roads are hundreds of red rectangular silhouettes of gone houses surrounded by small lawns now given license to run, but with the night-chirping sprinklers silenced they're not running, they're yellowing and whitening into dead admission that here is a species of flora that has no business in the Pilbara.

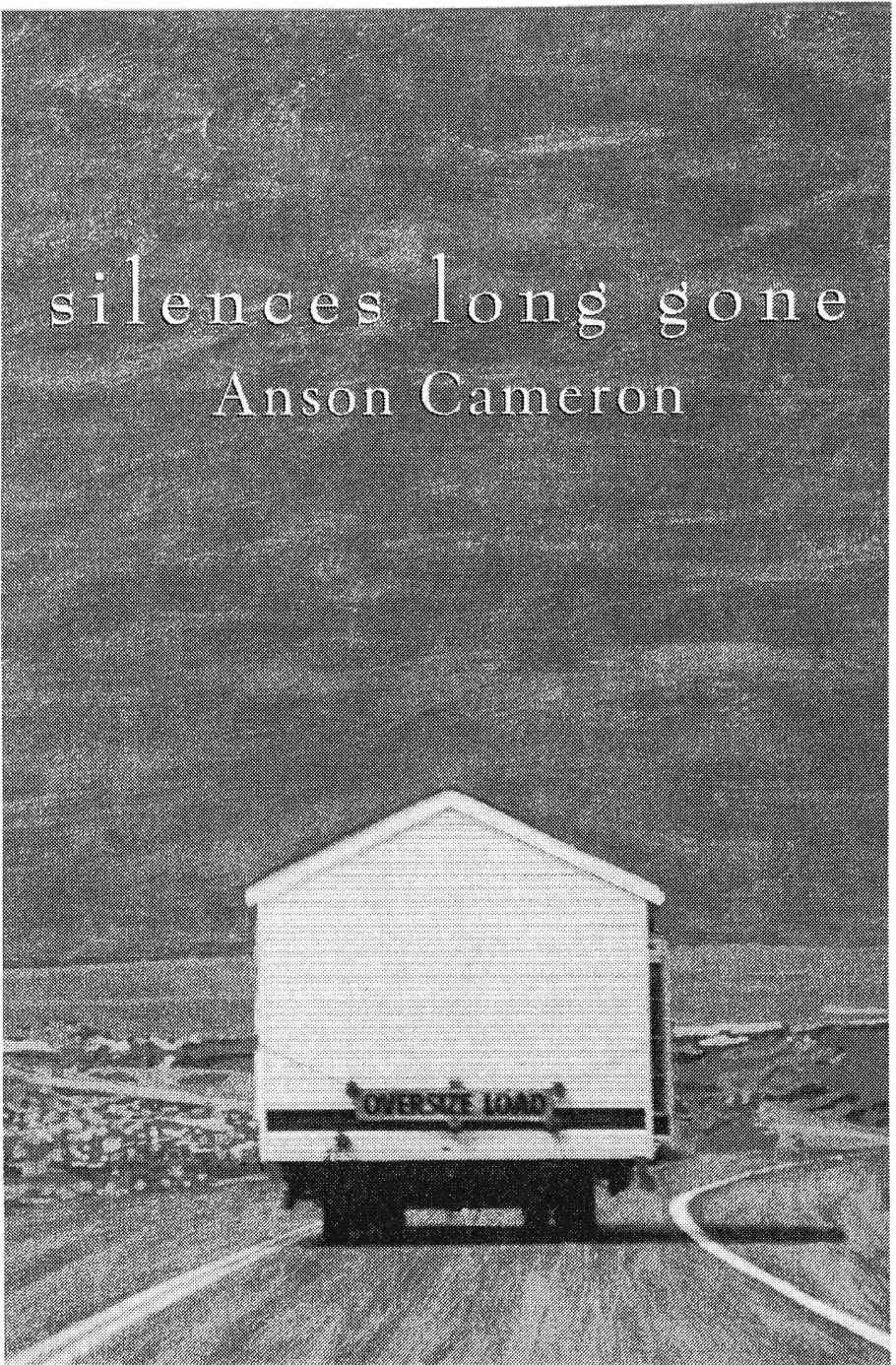
...

[Mrs Furphy's] garden stands out provocatively green with borrowed water. Greener than anything else here. Nothing else is this green for whole latitudes. (13)

This residual garden contains five blood-red rose bushes, fertilised by Belle's dead daughter's and husband's ashes: these personal memorials are the reason why this woman remains *in situ* under siege by company lawyers.³ Isolated but at home, sustained only by tenacity, native cunning, a threatening 'heart condition', an unwavering faith in God, and an unlikely guardian angel (a visiting newspaperman with integrity), Belle Furphy confronts relentless opposition forces.⁴ The company who leased land from Indigenous communities for 'mining and extraction' is contracted to return it to them in its natural state at the lease's end. And the end is nigh. But cemeteries (especially ashes under rose bushes) which might anchor people are forbidden and Mrs Furphy's shrine therefore represents a dangerous 'legal precedent'. Her cynical son, with a slowly-maturing caring-nature, takes a long time to admit involvement with his mother's plight. When not appalled by her evangelism he is horrified at not being able to compete with the dead, as indicated by his mother's habitual count of residual blessings:

When they bloom every year it's your father's message to me. And it's Molly's message to me. It's him and it's her. With a beautiful sign held aloft telling me they're waiting.

(28)



Cover illustration of *Silences Long Gone*, courtesy of Pan Macmillan. Original cover photograph by Nora T. Murphy, Horizon Photo Library. Cover design by Ruth Grüner.

When all else fails and the company (the BBK) threatens to have the recalcitrant woman certified, Thaw, Jack's surfing friend observes:

'Christ, my father was five times as insane as her and no one suggested he was mad.'
'He probably owned the land he lived on' [Replies Jack]. (227)

Ideas of respect for home spaces, decent and caring human governance and legal protection for those with just causes, are remote in this territory. And here the fiction reflects on the world. The inversions of black/white circumstance are cleverly juggled to problematise the entire arena of action. Just to the east of Mrs Furphy's garden is the remainder of the town of Tinburra where other rule-breakers linger. They are the residual mining staff whose lives have been disastrously affected by the Theozinc board which sat on the news of mesothelioma and asbestosis among its mine workers for years, and then decided, when sprung, to enlist government assistance and cover up their crime, by hastily:

closing it fast and [calling] it gone. Get a crew of dozer drivers space-suited up and push the whole town into the poisonous hole it came out of. Sign the whole area over to the tribe that made the land claim on it. (51-52)

This Maralinga-style political expediency is stymied by the refusal of terminally ill mine-workers to leave and it is Jack's brother, Adrian, the town cop, who presides over the last rites of that dying community, counting the empty bar stools until counselling fails one day and he dies on the job.⁵ Given government machinations and the political cover-up of negligent site management of British ex-test sites at Maralinga and proposals for nuclear waste dumps in South Australia I would be pleased if this was fiction.

Other national narratives are dismantled as Cameron unleashes a chain-saw brigade of 'post-Whitlam trained arborealists' who, in returning land to pristine Dreamtime perfection, cheerfully eliminate anything 'not-native' with absolute zeal.⁶

Men in hardhats on giant machines are committing reverse archaeology here. Tearing down and covering up any sign of town. An environmental reclamation unit is moving east through the whole map reference. Replanting spinifex, ghost gum, red gum, and desert oak. Landscaping Dreamtime curves into the country with D10 caterpillars. Hannah is becoming a deliberate lost city. A planned Atlantis. (16)

There is much more about inscription and reinscription in this text, from serious investigations of concepts of home and nation to more parodic impressions: like the short-lived pattern of the radial direction-finder impressed on Jack's buttocks at Lorne's summit look-out which proved an 'unparalleled panorama for fornication' (352). This inscription records the couple's escape from the unwanted attentions of the would-be writer of Jack's family story. This synthesis of serious and farcical elements of life and exploitation of intra-textual and inter-textual resonances echoes techniques employed in Furphy's *Such is Life*. In a

contemplative mood when struggling to define his own allegiances, Jack considers the more lasting effects of time and distance:

If Hannah is lingering in me in some susceptible place what unit of measure would appear after it to tell of its distance? Which wouldn't be kilometres or miles and wouldn't even be months or years, but would be something else altogether. (357)

REAL ESTATES: WINDLESS GULLIES VS COASTAL VIEWS

The narrative shifts between the Pilbara and the tree-studded beach-side location of Lorne, revealing contemporary social tensions in the land-rights debate and unscrupulous manipulation by city-based corporate powers. Jack Furphy shares his place amid the 'amphitheatre of trees' with Jean and their boarder, Thaw who does a steady trade in hot four-wheel drives — a kind of redistributive effort pioneered in the greener forests of Nottingham.⁷

The latter's life-story is both a counter-narrative and the key to the novel. The most horrific interface between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians is revealed through a long-suppressed story of an earlier time. In a hotel owned by Thaw's father, ironically called 'The Court House', abhorrent acts caused by drunkenness, ignorance, racism and neglect, claim the life of the Aboriginal girl, Kelly Atkinson. Thaw was nineteen and as his father, the publican, was drunk at the time, he was nominally 'in charge' of the pub on a night of escalating violence which spiralled out of control. Rape, murder and an ensuing conflagration ended his father's troubles, but the aftermath was a travesty of justice as the white perpetrators re-jigged their testimonies to become more 'credible' and protect each other (181). Thaw's refusal to co-operate in this white rehabilitation sees him labelled as chief suspect and marked for life. Much later he confesses culpability —to a degree:

'I had a hand in it', he tells Jack. 'I made it possible. Organised the event. I suppose. Was the impresario. Got her alone with us white men by chasing off with red heelers anyone who was black and who loved her.' (91)

In Lorne, before this story breaks, Jack is marketing either windless gullies or coastal views where 'bluegums grow right down out of the Otways to the water' and 'real estate is made exclusive by geography' (73). His partner Jean, who runs a gallery, is engaging: generous, talented, tolerant and loving and 'brown from being young enough to sunbake wildly never believing that death is a personal option' (193).⁸ When, like the girl from Ipanema, this 'free spirit' 'goes walking by', down to the sea in her togs, 'male retirees come out to pull weeds from their perfect gardens or tinker with their smooth running mowers' until she passes. In retaliation or payment for their gaze, she steals their fruit and knowingly causes aging voyeurs near-asphyxia as they crouch gasping in their dahlia beds.⁹

But Senior Sergeant Malcolm Lunn is far more dangerous: peddling poisonous rumour called 'pre-emptive law enforcement' (84), this cop with a persecution

complex has tried for years to 'finger' Thaw for the death of Kelly. When the law finally enforces a DNA test on Thaw to determine the case, the accused severs his own finger to prove (or test) his innocence. Although he is blameless, like others, regrettably often Indigenous people held in custody, he dies of guilt by association as he takes his own life without waiting for an official finding. Again, I would be pleased if this were merely fiction but in several Australian states (NT and WA) mandatory sentencing has removed the right of magistrates to mediate sentences in relation to the severity of crimes. The outcome of these draconian measures has seen more people locked up for minor offences, increasing the risks of self-harm.

HOME AND AWAY

Out in the desert, a hostage to her own convictions, Mrs Furphy stoically withstands seduction, intimidation, bullying, isolation and broadcast postcards from re-located residents in Surfer's Paradise condominiums or euphemistically named rest homes which feature opportunist promises to retirees of happy deaths on ergonomic beds (10). But when a visit from the 'Kunimara' people is arranged, the negotiations shift register. In permanent trauma from her teenage daughter's death, Mrs Furphy is also a vulnerable product of her culture and her lament is somewhat Hanson-esque¹⁰:

'How is it', she asks, 'they've made their Rainbow Serpent so much realer than my Frank'? Than my Molly, who died on the road outside?' She's picking little rayon balls off her slacks as she speaks, flicking them onto the floor. A rayon lint-ball fired with each question. 'Did their Rainbow Serpent tell the same old jokes for years and laugh like a fool at them every time? Did arthritis trouble their Rainbow Serpent at night, from tightening three-inch nuts across iron-dusted thread each day? Was their Rainbow Serpent a chronic thumb-sucker for so long we had to fly her to Perth to have braces fitted on her teeth when she stopped and the orthodontist cost us our holidays for three years? These things happened.' She looks at the woman. 'How is it you've made your Rainbow Serpent so real when I can't get anyone to believe in my Frank and Molly? I'd like to know how it's done.' (120)

This arranged visit by Indigenous representatives to persuade Belle of the company's right to evict her in the name of returning the land to its rightful owners, is cleverly portrayed. The incumbent listens unwillingly and is wholly unsettled as the Indigenous women explain their rights to the land. Understanding that home is sacred Mrs Furphy looks at their land maps 'hoping to see a lie' but cannot (120). Their unsentimental meeting is fraught with the issues of contested legitimacy and the history of dispossession and of black/white relations in towns all over Australia. Cameron has Pearl, the Indigenous woman, quietly reiterate her people's land rights — 'but she's apologetic about it' (120). Much later in the narrative, after the most militant of the delegation, Barry Campbell, has berated Mrs Furphy for implying *their* 'cultural imperialism' and 'bullying' — he wryly

observes that 'after two hundred years of calling our Dreamtime primitive shit' this company is suddenly promoting it's legitimacy as leverage (120). After Belle's death it is Barry who eventually recognises Belle's claim in these entirely different terms:

'She become blackfella, looked to me. That's why she was scared shitless of us other blackfellas 'cause she'd found out what it was to be one.' (323)

This reconciliatory gesture is made at Mrs Furphy's funeral when all the small-time participants gather in an exorcism of guilt while collectively disclaiming responsibility by insisting that 'they are not the heavy machinery' (325). The law is the heavy machinery capable of levelling fields — witness Mabo or the recent Hindmarsh Island decision which has brought overdue recognition of Indigenous credibility in respect of land rights and sites after ten years of acrimony. Despite apparent flippancy, the novel is about individual, moral, ethical and universal rights, and centrally, land rights and euthanasia. Thaw eventually puts Belle, the prime sufferer out of action by smothering her after administering champagne and pills, before killing himself.¹¹ But we are left with the ethical dilemma of this as either an act of violence or one of absolute compassion.

Silences Long Gone is about history-making and story-telling and the powerful effects of the personal and public fictions by which we live our lives. These texts interrogate the nature of emotional, symbolic, environmental and political investments in Australian life and foreground issues commonly erased from national inscription. It has been claimed that 'Furphy's socialist utopianism and his egalitarian Christian ideologies coexisted uneasily with social Darwinist assumptions about race which he accepted uncritically' (Devlin-Glass 355). But about other things Furphy was very astute. For example, in *The Buln Buln and the Brolga* he noted the way that stories of home are inscribed and legitimised:

...there is one thing that lasts longer than the tree...that is, the spoken word, the appellation. The Aboriginal name of this town will probably outlive any tree in Australia. Strange, isn't it — to think that a word, impalpable to touch and invisible to sight should be more enduring and reliable than any material monument? The history of nations — their migrations, settlements conquests — can be traced by the philologist far back into ages which afford little or no clue to the antiquarian. Yet in spite of the paramount significance of local destinations — or, perhaps because of it — the map of this young land is already defaced by ugly and incongruous names, transplanted from the other side of the world. (52)

Cameron's *Tin Toys* also has a thing or two to say about such appellations as the map, the land, the inhabitants ('serious patriarchy') as hallowed inscriptions like the flag are re-read. The hero, Hunter Carlyon, is a stolen child of an Indigenous mother, perceived as Aboriginal or white depending on the town he is in and the politics of the viewer. He claims: 'they let me be a white boy in Jefferson but when I began to turn into a man they made me black. Everywhere else I'm just a

man' (73). He sees himself as a product of a 'failed attempt at harmony between races' and explains that one year after his birth his mother suffered 'death by misadventure which was then called suicide. But my mother's death was never called policy at all' (226). Given what we now know of the policies that gave rise to The Stolen Generation, and the demise of mothers whose children were removed, this is not fiction.

Employed as a sign-painter depicting patriotic 'Aussie' flags on French restaurant walls, to avoid their owners being targeted by anti-nuclear protesters, Hunter stumbles onto a potentially prize-winning design 'the southern cross with red, yellow and black shadows thrown right and with Uluru underneath' which can 'embrace every citizen from Saxon through Slav ever sent here by war or revolution' as well as 'that citizen who was already here' (69). Hunter is in love with Kimi, a Japanese Australian whose business acumen and fine sense of post-colonial enterprise sees her sending tourists far *away* on high risk holidays: 'trips into danger – travel for the already out there' (54). The satire of this reversal is bleak:

Control Risks Global rates countries for travel and investment risk. From countries with virtually no crime and stable governments to countries where law and order has broken down and government has no control or the country has no government and the risk of travel is extreme. Kimi purchases these bulletins off the net and uses them to keep abreast of global troubles. And uses them for assessing the costs of travel insurance, which she sells to her clients along with their journeys into the Third and barbaric world. (334)

Hunter was taken from his Indigenous mother *by* his white father (with help from 'cops and nuns'). Since then the father has been constantly incarcerated, the last time, for taking pot-shots at jet-skiers ruining the peace of his river fishing retreat (having de-activated his police-monitored ankle-alarm by dowsing it in a bucket of water). He claims that his initial crime was being at home when his Indigenous partner's ex-lover came to kill him. His assailant died and, given this paternity, Hunter is marked for life. But before being condemned for his association with an Indigenous woman, Hunter's father was a respected councillor and businessman who ran a once-successful company called 'Truckited Nations'. This provides Cameron with a further opportunity to censure economic rationalism, so-called free trade, and to comment on the rapaciousness of global economic forces. The business is described in the following terms:

[T]ruck buyers came from a long way to see the world's trucks ranged side-by side. And my genius father got ten percent of every sale this outright and unprecedented bonhomie generated. Which prompted him to tell me many a time when I was a kid, that all you had to do was to move men to Mars to get a lasting peace.

It only lasted a handful of years. Until Stockholm got wind of it, and Detroit got wind of it, and Tokyo got wind of it, and London got wind of it, and Berlin got wind of it too. And then the great socio/economic experiment in harmonious international

relations and profit maximisation that was Truckited Nations was no more. The cartel formed by my father far from the watching eyes of the Chairman of Directors to incidentally maximise bonhomie between the races but primarily corner the truck market fell all to pieces. They broke it up, those faraway Chairmen of Directors, into five separate and competing dealerships that held each other in mutual contempt for their globulous evaporators and their stuttering turbochargers and their wide-hipped women and their pulsing disc brakes and their blinkered design engineers. But by then my father was rich from the years of dangerous cooperation. Was a sort of profiteer on peace. (84–85)

Father and son have little in common except their love of an absent mother, but when the destitute father breaks bail to get to the Australia day ceremony where Hunter may or may not win the prize for his inclusive flag design, the plot congeals rather than thickens. This reconciliation of diverse parties, like the nation's, is put on hold because the past intrudes. Hunter, the flag-designer, is also the ex-schoolboy who, after being up-ended in a fish tank by a racist school-master, once wrote a threatening letter to the then-Prime Minister and became a listed security risk. In the final scene of the novel he finds himself onstage with this Prime Minister (who wears a smile described as 'a scary thing of pre-planned rictus') as his escapee father materialises, along with a virtual voice-message from Kimi (presumed lost in Bouganville) with the security men about to move in. This is clearly not romance. This Australia Day may produce chaos or a resolution/reconciliation but Hunter's story remains a parable of the nation's potential (387).

CULTURAL FRONTIERS

In *Silences Long Gone* there is an equivalent uncertainty about codes of ethical practice and the relative 'power' of the individual in an information era. On the one hand, if there is publicity, a lone old woman can exert temporary influence:

BBK isn't sure what to do next. An unpaid water bill is a fine tool for coercion, as a rule. A fine truth to wave in a tenant's face. But it leads, in the end, to that same old point where you've waved your unpaid bill and stamped your feet and told your tenant 'This simply isn't good enough' so many times you can't wave and stamp and tell any more without looking hollow and powerless and just a waver and just a stamper and just a chronicler of things that simply aren't good enough. The point where you have to act.

And shutting off an old woman's water in the middle of a hot, dry land sounds even worse than eviction. Sounds like torture. Sounds like inhumanity. Sounds like an act that might scuff up a company's exquisitely manicured corporate image, if it were to get into print. (189)

Like good investigative journalism, this fiction engages with the global and regional issues of deadly seriousness, and silence is broken by speaking-out, as a first act of redress. Similarly, the title *Tin Toys* links back to the narrative's sagas of cars and trucks but provides a sharper focus. The production of hand-crafted

toys from re-cycled tin souvenired from around the world by Kimi, but also by world tourists' because they are 'made with the mysterious antediluvian science of a million focused hammer-taps', is put in a global perspective as the narrator claims that this is an indication of 'proving how far we, in our world, have come' (139). And now, imported tin toys are still being re-distributed and Mitsubishi cars exported, while 'antediluvian' Indigenous art represents Australia globally.

Frederick Jameson has spoken about the consumer society's propensity to live in the eternal present (125) but these audacious novels consider the formative effects that have shaped the nature of commercial and social values. Cameron is aware of the ease with which neo-colonial re-appropriations of image markets are made. Like Jameson, he studies the effects of market capitalism with its exploitative links to Imperialism and notes its postmodern phase in multinational capitalism and international corporations. However Cameron uses his fiction as a way of remembering. His satires measure tensions between city/rural, indigenous/non-indigenous, regional/global and private/corporate interests. While these fictions adopt a post-colonial review of colonised territories they also portray a nation re-negotiating shared spaces, which is potentially an emancipatory process. I suggested at the outset that this writing raised the question of how far 'past the post' (of post-colonial) we had managed *to become* in this country, and in the spirit of Cameron's texts I will end my reading with a paradox akin to the staged crisis of identification epitomised by imminent the clash of values 'staged' in *Tin Toys*. The major image of reconciliation in this country has been a series of walks over bridges as thousands of Australians have demonstrated their solidarity with the goals of reconciliation by taking to the streets in capital cities around Australia. But in *Tin Toys* a confrontation over right-of-way incurs race-based violence while in *Ngarrindjeri* home-lands in South Australia a bridge (built from the mainland to Hindmarsh Island) has caused so much offence that people will no longer access the island by road. This iconography, like that of an inclusive flag, suggest that there is a way to go if differences are to be genuinely accepted and reconciled and home spaces shared with mutual respect.

NOTES

- ¹ Cameron's novel also makes reference to its family legacy in the sense that 'Furphy' has come to mean, colloquially, a rumour or false story. (In the trenches of World War I the water carts [made by one John Furphy of Victoria] were sites of gossip and sometimes misinformation). Cameron's Jack investigates the ways that rumour serves the community in Lorne (Vic) and the ways in which story-telling has consequences that are wholly unexpected. At the end of the book, in discussion about novels and film with the 'famous' novelist (who is mostly known from his appearance on 'Burke's Backyard'), Jack makes a deliberate 'Furphy' when he mistakenly speaks of *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* (Murphy) another political novel about Indigenous oppression and presumed madness.

- ² The role of the narrator in *Silences Long Gone* is similarly problematic as Jack's inaction leads to others' involvement.
- ³ In Furphy's novel Molly is kicked by a horse and loses her nose and being disfigured is then jilted. Cameron's Molly is felled by a company truck while being chased in a harmless bit of bra-snapping sexual by-play on her sixteenth birthday. Belle's husband dies of cancer (and a drink-induced stupor condoned by his son which causes an estrangement between Belle and Jack). Throughout, matters of life and death are 'dealt with' matter-of-factly. Jack's father's gamble with cancer is recounted like a card game (149) as the oncologist and thoracic surgeon alternately play their hands. After his death and the vodka and red cordial send-off he is brought home to rest and added to Molly's garden.
- ⁴ Cameron, like Furphy, employs cartoon-like exaggeration to expose injustice. For example, several kinds of power are satirised in the 'hostage situation' as 'Didgeridoo music' is broadcast day and night to terrify Mrs Furphy who seeks relief in radio programs where God is pumped in via the Philippines or talk-back shows where hosts work as 'dream interpreters' to recommend applications for Arts Council Grants.
- ⁵ Jack at his most scathing utters this anti-religious diatribe about his brother's death: 'It's all I can do to resist asking why she thinks it is Our Father would make a situation like Tinburra for Adrian to be a steady rock in in the first place. Maybe Our Father set up the whole cancerous tragedy, the whole carcinogenic trap, for Adrian to prove his worth in. Maybe Our Father said to Jesus, "Now look here Jesus, I know asbestosis is a tough call and I know mesothelioma is a debilitating bitch but look at that young man there. I believe he's made of the right stuff and just needs surrounding with innocent death to be able to prove himself. A young man like that needs opportunity. And if you don't give me any grief on this I'll let the Americans find those thousands of P.O.W.s we've been holding in Nam all these decades. Is it a deal, Son?" Something like that' (24).
- ⁶ The logger-come-environmentalist puts it bluntly enough: 'Jesus peppercorns are bastards to cut and can blunt a chain fast as dirt. They're fucking weeds, these things. The others are just struggling along. But these things are fucking weeds. From Peru they are. Bastards. He lifts his visor up onto his helmet and puts his boot up the trunk of the tree and tries to pull out his saw. He works it back and forward and swears against everything Peruvian till its out' (99). Later the logger mellows to observe, whilst cutting out *Tipuana tipu*, 'Nice tree in its place' (100) and granting longevity to *Acacia baileyana* he works 'to his own Hippocratic oath' (101).
- ⁷ Echoing Furphy's 'multicultural jamboree' local Greek/Australian crayfishermen are obsessed by defending their patch from 'Asian' freeloaders evincing all the recognisable prejudices of an Australian seaside town (this is not 'Sea-Change'). Thaw may have lost the plot of his planned lesbian novel and endured surfing misadventures but he understands that Jack ('Mr Couldn't-Give-a-shit') is not unmoved by his mother's deteriorating condition (281).
- ⁸ The question of the borders between art and life are also interrogated in Jean's later exhibition of Mrs Furphy's obsessive purple paintings of 'Sad Dad and Sad Molly' — the latter's death 'by bra' providing the model for Jean's curious tribute. Later in the tale, grief as art form becomes a marketable commodity — and it is the mining company which has a vested interest. But just who is 'buying' whom becomes extremely difficult to determine. The scene of the gallery-showing is high farce as the pretensions of the community are tested in a confrontation between a champagne saturated narrator, a lobster wielding fisherman and the soul-fishing grey sister intent on psychoanalysing Belle's paintings. This ends with frenetic love-making as antidote to Jack's grief and

his spirited defence of his mother's obsession of only for its argument with 'landscapes and 'still life'. There is a great deal of sex in the face of death in this novel.

- ⁹ At the other end of the vulnerability spectrum, Mrs Furphy, held *in situ* by permanent trauma from her teenage daughter's death, retreats into her wardrobe nightly to inhale the last scents of her lost child. This is also bleak echo of Kelly's death as she was found in a wardrobe by her mother.
- ¹⁰ Pauline Hanson is the founder and former leader of One Nation, a far-right conservative political party in Australia.
- ¹¹ When we have heard the whole sorry tale the teller claims that whatever has been said of *the family* — 'that wasn't them'.

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