

## Australian Anosognosia

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Dip VA, BVA Hons, MAVA

Pauper prisoner, soldier sailor!  
Pioneer invader, settler gaoler!  
*This is Australia!*<sup>1</sup>

Some of my forebears lived in that place Captain Cook wrote of in his log.<sup>2</sup> My people were some of those who followed his progress past Gillarae<sup>3</sup> and K'gari.<sup>4</sup> As he watched them, they watched him, and wondered about the HMS *Endeavour* too. The event of Cook's passing was discussed, and a yauar warrai, or 'corroboree', was made by the yauar nuva (song maker). My great-great-grandmother could easily have been in the audience when the yauar was performed at the place of crows, or Wa Wa.<sup>5</sup> And upon that now distant starry night, coalesced of woven word, the story of that strange event would have been related:

Gavrin woondulla yarneen areeram?  
Anyon gane wein kum ya yeelong?  
Oonda woonyamba dahla thoorringba gaveer barine?  
Mumo gumbling bunder vuree oor thaane munya,  
Yooiin mumo gumber bilung unda,  
Tickera thunda kungmungaleen moonya.

[Where are these strangers going?  
Where are they trying to steer?  
They go to that place Thoovovr, can you believe that?  
See the smoke (foam) of the waves as they crash,  
They bury themselves like crabs in the sand,  
They disappear over the horizon like clouds.]<sup>6</sup>

In his journal, Cook mentions the "Indians", the "natives", and accordingly "names" this place of encounter "Indian Head".<sup>7</sup> As the yauar states, Cook proceeds beyond Thoorvoor, disappearing into the place of rainbow water.<sup>8</sup> Eight years passed, and then Pemulwuy<sup>9</sup> watched as the birth of Port Jackson took place, how it grew. And as he saw the glint of Leviathan's<sup>10</sup> cold and rheumy colonial eye, he struck swiftly, and, so nearly did the followers of the crow

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<sup>1</sup> David Jones, unpublished poetry, 2014.

<sup>2</sup> A. W. Reed, ed. *Captain Cook in Australia: The Journals of Captain James Cook* (Sydney: A. H. & A. W. Reed, 1969).

<sup>3</sup> Headland near Teewah, now known as Rainbow Beach, Queensland, Australia.

<sup>4</sup> Now known as Fraser Island, although the national park on the island has recently been renamed Kgari, which means paradise in Butchulla language.

<sup>5</sup> Wa Wa was a gathering place and known as a place of crows by my Dalungbarra ancestors.

<sup>6</sup> This was a yauar or corroboree my father was ever keen to perform. Found in Robin A. Wells, *In the Tracks of a Rainbow: Indigenous Culture and Legends of the Sunshine Coast* (Queensland: Gullirae Books, 2003), 1.

<sup>7</sup> Reed, *Captain Cook in Australia*, 59.

<sup>8</sup> A dangerous sand shoal off the K'gari (Fraser Island) coast.

<sup>9</sup> The spelling of this Indigenous hero's name is taken from Willmot, *Pemulwuy: The Rainbow Warrior*.

<sup>10</sup> Leviathan as described by Thomas Hobbes in his book of the same name: "For by Art is created that great LEVIATHAN called a COMMON-WEALTH, or STATE, (in latine CIVITAS) which is but an Artificiall Man; though of greater stature and strength than the Naturall," sourced from "Leviathan, by Thomas Hobbs," Project

come to vanquishing that terrible monster. Yet it grew across their plains, cast its shadow into their worlds, and the Killing Time began. Replication followed, a division, and then there were three: Port Jackson, Port Arthur, and the Moreton Bay penal settlements. The question of *where those strangers were going* was answered by the early 1800s, as stories of invasion, war and massacre sped along the song-lines.

And then they came. How disturbing for the Dalungdalee<sup>11</sup> it must have been to watch methari (spirits) return to the world, white wraiths such as Durrumboi or James Davis, flitting along the shoreline along Teerwah.<sup>12</sup> Though it was quickly evident that these newcomers were no ghostly spirits, on their mortal backs they carried all manner of daemon, to grow and thrive in the dawning light of nation: greed and avarice, violence and hate, bigotry and hypocrisy, to name only a few of those malevolent homunculi. Defiance shown by my forebears was ever derided by laughing, leering, crouched gargoyles, national white stone warders built of racial theory, perched in the eaves of that grand national construct: Australia. The sibling arch-daemons, repression and revision, malingering in the shadows of the national façade, haunt the half-light halls of state, and writhe betwixt the words of law and its purpose. These violent guardians of the Australian nation have pedigree, and are born of the violent actions of those first free and freed ‘settlers’, which are reborn of each inaction today.

Gun and sword flag and drum!  
That's how a'settlin's done!  
Bury the bodies and cover the graves,  
That's how Australia's made!

So on and on and around they go,  
Acts held high and mind down low,  
Will they stop?  
Nobody knows,  
Caught in their colonial dream...<sup>13</sup>

Far to the right, the light of Capitol Hill’s pyre of nation burns brightest as the devotees stoke their fervent blaze for Australia Day. Smaller flares in red, blue, and white dot that dreary landscape, patriotic communities all march on and on through their archaic dreams of benign cultural superiority. Would that those with their shoulders to the task cease their toil for a moment, spell that old horse Glory for a time, and reflect on their actions. That old creaking corpus of empire remains upon its curved course though, driven on by the fervent and indifferent alike. Upon a re-inscribed land, the Australian ‘settler’ treads with infinite care, lest their footfall tear the thin veneer of a carefully crafted nation state. Their march of Australian progress and pride leaves an intergenerational wake of imposed physical and mental trauma that ripples through the already rent cosmos of Indigenous peoples’ interconnection and reciprocation.

Out here, flitting along the pressure seams of “Malinowski shapes”,<sup>14</sup> where my identity often finds itself, my attitude is checked by tendrils/vanes of memory that orient my perspective. From here, between the Indigenous socio-cultural bio-cosmos and ‘settler’ landscaped Australian society and culture, ‘settler’ colonial-collective denial looks much like a churning vicious cycle of anxiety. The flow of the ‘settler’ colonial-collective on its seeming curved course kicks up a socio-culturally corrosive, looming storm-front of individually minute, culturally abrasive actions and inactions. The great monoliths that ‘settler’ Australians struggle with, ever and on, in their endless march of action without reflection, leave an audible wake. Generated by the hollows and holes in those national constructs, the monotonous whine is tolerated or ignored by a minority in the ‘settler’ Australian society. Many more chant in sanctimonious harmony as they toil for nation or sing along in strident and over-exuberant glee. Either way, dancing or marching, they ignore the odd clatter and crunch of bone underfoot. Most has been swept away, before the majority advance, or hidden in the national cabinet of historical denial, and the individual family cupboards of personalised misremembering.

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Gutenberg, last modified 29 January 2013, [https://www.gutenberg.org/files/3207/3207-h/3207-h.htm#link2H\\_4\\_0001](https://www.gutenberg.org/files/3207/3207-h/3207-h.htm#link2H_4_0001).

<sup>11</sup> Author’s family group belonging to the Dalungbarra people.

<sup>12</sup> Now known as Rainbow Beach, Queensland, Australia.

<sup>13</sup> David Jones, unpublished poetry, 2015.

<sup>14</sup> Healy, *Literature and the Aborigine in Australia, 1770-1975*.

The ever-expanding socio-cultural storm-front is lit up by the perpetually polarising racial frisson along its outward frontier. Those ‘settlers’ who form the intergenerational vanguard of ‘progress’ work where lightning strikes of ‘pure white policy’ earth, in the light of the crackle and flicker of simplistic, racial ideologies they toil. The pure/sterile white light illuminates their immediate course, blinding them from future ramifications attached to present actions, and the effects of past actions on their present course. Australian politicians and polity alike remain trapped in their bright ‘false now’, a “false concept of reality”,<sup>15</sup> dissociated from reality through the pursuit of material wealth, power, and prestige. Would that their cold hearts warm with empathy, that the splinter of racial looking glass in their eyes melt; then they could see their own footprints ahead of them in the land, churned up by their cyclic procession, and step aside from that eddy of denial and onto a path of real progress.<sup>16</sup>

So many Aussies,  
Jumping on our dead,  
One fell down  
And woke in dread.

Went an’ called the doctor,  
The doctor said,  
“No more Aussies,  
Jumping on our dead.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Gilbert, *Because a White Man’ll Never Do It*, xvii.

<sup>16</sup> Such as Hans Christian Andersen’s Kay in *The Snow Queen* story found at the website, H.C. Andersen Centret, “Hans Christian Andersen: The Snow Queen,” accessed 15 May 2017, [http://www.andersen.sdu.dk/vaerk/hersholt/TheSnowQueen\\_e.html#top](http://www.andersen.sdu.dk/vaerk/hersholt/TheSnowQueen_e.html#top).

<sup>17</sup> David Jones, unpublished poetry, 2017.

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