

Humanity 2008

Truth & Artifice

Abstracts

JULIETTA GIBBONS

(Creative Writing, The University of Newcastle)

Artifice in Writing the Truth in a Memoir of Early Childhood

When we write about our past and try to weave the experiences into a coherent narrative, there is inevitably an element of artifice involved. When I started writing down the 'story' of my early childhood, I found it difficult to locate a particular landmark from where and when the act of remembering began. There are memories that I can't verify and some are so vivid that I cannot but think that I have imagined them. This uncertainty about the veracity of the memories presented a stumbling block. Finally, I decided that my work would be part fiction. I had to create a canvas on which I could weave bits of memories and portraits of people that are, from this vantage point of the remembering present, close to being figments of my imagination. Collating these 'creatively' and giving them linearity as truthfully as my mind and heart could muster, are the forces guiding me in the journey. And yet in spite of the 'artifice' involved, the narrative I had accomplished so far could not be truer than what 'probably' had really happened. The creative and sympathetic artifice becomes, in fact, a vehicle in finding back my childhood.

In writing my presentation, I will draw on the memoirs of Virginia Woolf, Annie Dillard, Clive James and Michael Ondaatje; to analyze the 'artifice' involved in recounting the story of their early childhood. Could a kaleidoscope of distant memories/facts be woven on a 'creative/fictive' canvas, or is there no other way?

ANNE MARIE MONCHAMP

(Anthropology, Macquarie University)

Alètheia

Knowledge of the past is a contentious issue in many contexts for a variety of reasons. The issue of historical truth is particularly problematic in Australia where in recent decades many Aboriginal Australians have challenged previously held interpretations of colonization, settlement and continued interaction. Entangled in this controversy are issues of memory and history relating to not only who is telling the truth but also what counts as truth in discussions of the past.

This presentation will be a brief introduction to the theme of autobiographical memory in an Aboriginal Australian community looking at the forms reminiscences of the past often take in this context and the ways in which these kinds of stories have been treated by various disciplines. The primary focus of this paper will be the role of time and temporality in assessments of verticality from history, philosophy and anthropology in regards to certain types of Aboriginal Australian stories.

EDWARD BRIDGE

(Biblical Studies, Macquarie University)

Enslaved to an artifice: a study into the self-designation, 'slave/servant', as used in the Ancient Near East before the time of Alexander the Great.

In ancient Palestine, a plaintiff calls himself 'servant/slave' to the official whom he wants to hear his case. High ranking officials in Babylonia inscribe on their signet rings or seal-cylinders 'servant/slave' of such and such a king. A woman has inscribed on her signet ring, 'maid servant' of so and so. Among the Jews in Elephantine in Egypt, equals sometime call themselves 'servant/slave' to each other. What is meant by these self-designations? Are they to be taken as literal 'truth'; that is the subject is all that the term, 'slave' connotes, or as a metaphorical artifice that may connote quite different meanings to those typical for the term, 'slave'. The self-designation as used in a selection of Ancient Near East texts from a variety of genres is analysed to reconstruct possible reasons why people in the ANE used the self-designation, and how scholars have understood the self-designations. It is concluded that the self-designation, 'slave/servant' is a metaphoric artifice used by people in the ANE to claim status or the right to be considered favourably by means of the connotation that they are obedient to a higher power.

SILMA IHRAM

(Cultural and Social Analysis, The University of Western Sydney)

Muslim Youth Interpretations of a Misunderstood Leadership

In late 2006 the controversial then Mufti of Australia – Sheikh Taj ud Din al Hilali gave a 15 minute advice to the women of his mosque after the Tarawih prayers in Ramadan. Unknown to him the talk was taped, translated and released to the media with the now infamous “cat and meat sermon” dividing the Muslim community and bringing further unwanted notoriety to its religious leadership. Embedded in traditional conservative ideas, the talk was interpreted by media and politicians as evidence that Muslim values and aspects of Islamic leadership were a threat to the Australian way of life. In response the Muslim community debated an array of interpretations and perspectives on the role and responsibility of religious leadership. These debates entrenched young Muslim’s belief in a hostile media and brought into sharp relief issues of identity and citizenship. It also affected and challenged young Muslim’s view of their religious leadership. This paper will analyse how the resulting controversy was artfully interpreted by various players including local community and political leaders through the media, and its affect on male Muslim youth in South Western Sydney, based on interviews with young Muslims and prominent youth mentors and leaders

CHERYL DAWES

(Early Modern History, The University of Newcastle)

The Queen Consort and the imprisoned courtier: the burden of conversion.

“Well, wife” if you cannot live without this Catholic piety “do your best to keep things as quiet as possible; for, if you don’t, our crown is in danger”. Practice artifice – maintain secrecy.

He would not gain his liberty by offending God, “he would prefer that his soul should be torn from his body

rather than his body should be released on such terms”. Profess and proselytize a truth – lose liberty.

The concepts of truth and artifice and how they were perceived and utilized by people in sixteenth and seventeenth century England, the post Protestant Reformation era, could mean the difference between a life of imprisonment or a life of secrecy; it would mean the difference between life and death for many. My narrative tells two stories of conversion to the Catholic faith, in a place, and during a time, when Catholicism was considered heretical and its open practice punishable by unusual penalties, imprisonment, exile, or death.

Proselytizing the truth would see a wealthy land owner and courtier of the Elizabethan royal court, one Thomas Pounce, Esquire, imprisoned for 30 years, while the clever practice of artifice would ensure that a queen, Anne of Denmark, Queen Consort of King James the First of England, retained her crown and her head. Both were converts to Catholicism and their lives intersected but briefly. However, evidence can suggest that the Queen’s intercession aided in the prisoner gaining a conditional liberty in 1604. Pounce lived a life of suffering and deprivation abandoning his wealth, a gay and advantageous life, and a law career, to profess the “true religion” and proselytize his new found Catholic faith. He was imprisoned and/or outcast between 1571 and 1613. Anne of Denmark, the first Stuart Queen Consort of England, lived a life of masquerade with the appearance of frivolity interspersed with manic behaviour. She suffered ill-health and sadness, but artfully found ways to express her Queenship and her Catholic piety within the bounds of the severely restrictive patriarchal and Protestant environment of early seventeenth century England between 1603 and 1619.

ROBERT DICK

(Modern History, Macquarie University)

Communism in Australia -- False Promises

The attraction of Communism was powerful enough in the mid 1940s to persuade over 20,000 Australians to call themselves Communist. The apparent success of the Russian Revolution that handed victory to the Russian proletariat had inspired radicals and revolutionaries everywhere, Australia included. That success was considerably boosted by the heroic efforts of the Red Army during World War 2.

By 1960 membership of the Communist Party of Australia had begun to dwindle until insufficient numbers forced the Party to disband in 1990. The rapidity of the decline in Australia and elsewhere is often explained as due to the realisation that what Lenin and later Stalin had created out of Marx’s ideas was in fact a contrivance, an artifice for pursuing political and other gains.

This paper will explore the extent to which some Australians became convinced that Communism offered a better way of life and why they embraced it. Negotiating the twists and turns of Soviet policy and actions and to rationalise these was a necessary part of being a believer. But as events in Hungary, Czechoslovakia and elsewhere exposed the truth about Soviet intentions the rejection of Communism proved for many to be a painful journey.

PETER BOWER

(Creative Writing, University of Newcastle)

Turning Beer into Whine: An Exploration of Newcastle and Hunter Valley Establishments

“An Exploration of Newcastle & Hunter Valley Drinking Establishments” examines the shift in identity within people and establishments throughout pubs and clubs in the local area, and looks at some of the contributing influences that create this change. The paper

incorporates ficto-critical exploration, poetry, photography and sociological analysis to grasp the vastly varied cultures within these establishments, and discover the artifice of patrons, staff, and the establishments themselves

ERIN ISON

(Modern History, The University of Newcastle)

Bombs, “reds under the bed”, and the media: The Menzies Government’s manipulation of public opinion, 1949–1957

It is often implied that the Menzies government influenced the Australian public for political advantage. Rarely, however, has this claim been substantiated. The objective of this paper is to add credence to this claim by arguing the Menzies government actively sought to manipulate public opinion in order to ensure the longevity of the British atomic test trials held in Australia between 1952 and 1957. The Australian government was adamant the British atomic trials should remain in Australia to guarantee what it hoped would be its eventual access to the technology, which at the time it was not privy to. Consequently, the Australian government could not risk an unfavourable press and a hostile public, which would undoubtedly put the atomic test trials in jeopardy.

The Menzies government used the image of the Australian “way of life” as the focus of its manipulation. Suggesting the fabric of Australian society was under threat from the evils of communism, the government rallied to highlight the need to defend the nation from this foreign threat. It was this need to “defend the nation” that was used to justify the testing of atomic weapons within Australia’s shores, and subsequently inflamed existing fear within the Australian community. This scheme, however, was a failure as public anxiety surrounding the tests continually rose.

This political strategy illustrates the tendency of Menzies to pursue his own agenda whether it represented the wishes of the Australian public or not. The underlying issue within this study is not the public’s understanding of the facts, but what it perceived was the truth and how that “truth” was presented to them through the media.

PAUL CHOJENTA

(Film Studies, The University of Newcastle)

Celluloid Historians: Understanding Watergate through *All the President’s Men*.

This paper considers the influence that fictional cinema has on public understanding of history. Specifically, it analyses the role that Alan J. Pakula’s 1976 film *All the President’s Men*, has had in developing and perpetuating the narrative of the Watergate scandal. Historians often accuse filmmakers of inaccurate, and sometimes irresponsible, depictions of historical events, questioning the credibility of writers and directors that are not bound by the rules of academic integrity. Nonetheless, cinema often provides a basis of historical understanding for a general public that are far more inclined to engage with a fictional film than an academic text. *All the President’s Men* provides a useful example as the influence of the film can be measured through its effect on the United States Presidential election results of 1978. This study will examine how the filmmakers were able to create such an influential portrayal of history, through the film form, by examining the cinematic techniques utilised. Further, it will consider the film’s lasting influence as an historical record of the Watergate saga.

JENNY STRONG

(Social Work, The University of Newcastle)

Holistic practice without spirituality? Truth and Artifice in a Child Health setting

The International Federation of Social Workers states that “the holistic focus of Social Work is universal.” How holistic is a health assessment that avoids the very core of the client’s family? By that, I mean the spiritual strengths employed by that family, the capacity to get up every morning and face the day, no matter how challenging. Spirituality, where it is defined as a strength to be drawn on and a means of connecting to the self and others in a meaningful and sometimes transcendent way is often neglected or avoided. This is particularly so in government organisations, where, in the 1980’s, spirituality became a dirty word.

Sometimes I watch myself and my colleagues during multidisciplinary child assessments and wonder how the clients and their families tolerate the invasion they experience every time “a professional” does an assessment. At the very least we are meant to do no harm. At the very least, in a Child Health multi-disciplinary setting, we should provide an interaction that is holistic, beneficial, dialogical, and respectful.

Whose truth am I living when I do a family assessment; mine, the organisation’s or the family’s? What artifice do I employ when I convince myself and my client that this is for their good? This paper will discuss the need for investigating spiritual capital in a family health context providing a case study of a government child health assessment service.

PATRICK BRYSON

(Creative Writing, The University of Newcastle)

Truth and Artifice: Representations of madness and the schizoid personality.

Representations of madness and the schizoid personality pose problems for the author intent on recreating a true account of lived experience. If the writer has not suffered from a mental illness personally, they are bound to be questioned on matters of authenticity. Conversely, if the author has suffered a mental illness their reliability as an eye witness then comes into focus.

How, if at all, can you separate the Truth from the Artifice? Are they codependent or does one get in the way of the other?

In 1966 Peter Kocan shot to infamy after a failed attempt on the life of then opposition leader, Arthur Calwell. During his subsequent incarceration in the maximum security criminal ward of Morrisett Mental Hospital, and in his outside life post-hospitalisation, Kocan went on to document institutional life in his poetry and his prose.

A study of Kocan’s novellas *The Treatment* and *The Cure*, shows us how he managed, through the use of a complex 2nd person (and 1st person plural) narrative structure, to use Truth and Artifice to his advantage in his portrayal of Len Tarbutt, a schizoid character based heavily on the author.

FRANCESCA BELL

(Art, Psychology and Aesthetics, The University of Newcastle)

Giving the Worm No Hollow Food

My presentation will examine our understanding of truth from the viewpoint of creative

expression, and take for its starting point Mervyn Peake's statement of his aspirations as an artist, set forth in the short poem *If I could see not surfaces*:

If I could see not surfaces
But could express
What lies beneath the skin
Where the blood moves
In fruit or head or stone,
Then would I know the one
Essential
And my eyes
When dead
Would give the worm
No hollow food

The poem has profound implications concerning the nature of individual consciousness and its debt to corporeality. Adopting an interdisciplinary approach, I want to focus on the anxieties generated by this conflict, how the creative arts are intimately involved with its resolution, and briefly consider:

the artist's sense of identity, reliant on a close bond with the physical world.

conflict with psychological mechanisms of denial and repression intended to shield the individual from creature anxiety.

the reciprocal relationship between perception and expression, imagination and the sensual world.

how artifice can be used to achieve candour of expression.

My examples will consider Peake himself, together with other artists and poets, and my conclusions will be drawn with particular reference to current environmental and ecological issues.