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The Darkest Aspect:

Mabo and Liam Davison's *The White Woman*

In 1962, Douglas Pike, the Professor of History at the Australian National University, published a book called *Australia: The Quiet Continent*. As the title indicates, Pike describes a land only awakened from its historical slumber by the arrival of Europeans at the end of the eighteenth century. Aboriginal participation in the nation's story is quieted in Pike's work. Aboriginal people are barely mentioned in 233 pages of text, other than being referred to as "native people [held] in stone-age bondage" (1) or as "primitive food-gatherers [who] were no match for the white invader" (36). Passages stating that "the Australian communities took shape as peaceful outposts of British civilization" (3), ignore or suppress any suggestion that the land was taken from Aboriginal people by force. This was entirely in keeping with the fashion of Australian historical narrative for the time.

However, the years immediately following the publication of Pike's history saw loud critique of representations of Australia as a 'quiet' continent. Aboriginal protests for better wages and working conditions, citizenship rights, land rights and self-determination throughout the 1960s and beyond, challenged assumptions that Australia's indigenous peoples were a silent, 'dying' race. As well, in 1968, the anthropologist Bill Stanner famously critiqued the quietness inherent in much Australian history writing in his Boyer Lectures. Stanner coined the term "The Great Australian Silence" to describe the structural "inattention" paid to Aboriginal history in Australian history writing of the twentieth century (182, 188). He argued that such inattention had developed into "a cult of forgetfulness practised on a national scale" (189). He said that a national history ought to consider "the other side of a story over

which the great Australian silence reigns" (189). Stanner's critique of Australia's wilful historical amnesia helped trigger the writing of what Bain Attwood calls "the new Australian history" throughout the 1970s and 80s (xv). This new history represented Australia's foundation "in terms of an invasion and not settlement" (Attwood 105).

This refashioned history about Australia was the historical narrative framework that was adopted by the High Court judges in the Mabo decision of 1992. Drawing on these stories of the colonisation of Australia, the judges determined that the nation's narrative of settlement, and the entire legal and political apparatus that had upheld that story, was founded on a "fiction by which the rights and interests of indigenous inhabitants in land were treated as non-existent" (*Mabo* 28). The continent was considered to have been uninhabited (a *terra nullius*) when the British first established a settlement, the judges declared. Indigenous Australians were not a part of this story of discovery and settlement. They were seen in legal (and cultural) terms as too "barbarous" and too "destitute [...] of the rudest forms of civil polity" (*Mabo* 27) to have been considered proprietors of the soil. But in Mabo, the judges declared that such views "depended on a discriminatory denigration of indigenous inhabitants, their social organisation and customs" (27), and that such "unjust and discriminatory doctrine [could] no longer be accepted" (29). For the judges in Mabo, such discriminatory thinking was no longer in accord with international legal standards nor with "the contemporary values of the Australian people" (*Mabo* 29). In the Mabo judgement, then, the judges of the High Court sought to bring legal reasoning into line with "the historical sea change of the 1970s and 1980s in relation to Aboriginal rights" (Hunter 11). In effect, the Mabo judgement rejected the conventional historical narrative of the largely peaceful settlement of an empty land, and posited, instead, a new narrative: that "Aboriginal [...] dispossession underwrote the development of the nation" (*Mabo* 50), and that this act of dispossession constituted "the darkest aspect of the history of this nation" (*Mabo* 82).

The rejection of Australia's conventional historical narrative and the re-writing of this narrative to assert an indigenous presence in the land and in history, is also a feature of much historical fiction written in the wake of the Mabo decision. This essay examines one lesser-known work of historical fiction, which, in retrospect, might now be read as the first 'post-Mabo' historical novel, as it was published in 1994: Liam Davison's *The White Woman*. I begin with a brief survey of shifts in the writing of the historical novel through the 1970s, 80s, and 90s, in order to explain what I mean by *post-Mabo* historical fiction, before turning my attention to Davison's text as an exemplar of post-Mabo narrative prose.

The Historical Novel and the "Darkest Aspect"

The violence attendant to the dispossession of Aboriginal people on the colonial frontier was, in the main, elided in historical fiction for most of the twentieth century, just as it was in historical non-fiction. Kerryn Goldsworthy notes that novelists of historical fiction in the earlier part of the twentieth century concentrated on three aspects of nineteenth-century Australia: convicts, pioneers and gold (109). In a similar vein, Susan Sheridan notes that most historical fiction of the post-World War II decades "reinforced the prevailing 'national story' of heroic pioneers and oppressed convicts" (9). Sheridan does name some exceptions to the norm, including Eleanor Dark's *The Timeless Land*, published in 1941 (8), and before I proceed I would like to add some other texts to this list. Thea Astley (whom Sheridan also names [9]), in both her 1974 novel *A Kindness Cup* and her 1987 novel *It's Raining in Mango*, seeks to incorporate Aboriginal histories into her fiction. As well, Robert Drewe's first novel, *The Savage Crows* (1976), tells the story of a journalist who quits his steady job to write a history thesis about the "hunting down, slaughter, rape, infanticide, betrayal [and] deportation" of Tasmania's Aborigines (Drewe 36). Mudrooroo Narogin's novel, *Doctor Wooreddy's Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World* (published under the name of Colin Johnson in 1983), is also about the destruction of Tasmanian Aboriginal society. In Peter Carey's third novel, *Oscar and Lucinda* (1988), key characters are direct

witnesses to and/or participants in colonial invasion and the murder of Aboriginal people on the frontier. In this sense, Carey's historical novel, as well as the historical novels of Astley, Drewe and Narogin, function as poignant exceptions to the historical-fiction norm.

However, much more historical fiction published in the wake of the Mabo decision has acknowledged Aboriginal occupation of the land, and many novels have concentrated on reviving, re-telling or re-imagining stories of Aboriginal dispossession by 'white' settlers/invasaders. What many of these novels are also doing is challenging the very *construction* of history as a discipline, as a credible story of the nation's past, such that 'History' as a hegemonic narration of nation is now open to more intense scrutiny in fiction writing. Linda Hutcheon calls such fiction writing "historiographic metafiction" (105). It is a writing that "problematizes the entire notion of historical knowledge" and "plays upon the truth and lies of the historical record" (89, 114). It seeks to refute "the natural or common-sense methods of distinguishing between historical fact and fiction," thereby asserting that "both history and fiction are discourses, human constructs, signifying systems, and both derive their major claim to truth from that identity" (Hutcheon 93). With regard to post-Mabo novels, Richard Flanagan's *Death of a River Guide* (1994) and Brian Castro's *Drift* (1994), both probe the denials, suppressions, silences and exaggerations that have gone into the creation of Tasmania's officially sanctioned past. Flanagan's 2001 novel *Gould's Book of Fish: A Novel in Twelve Fish*, offers, at one level, a "re-writing of the history of the penal system and of colonialism from the point of view of its underbelly, the convict class" (Devlin-Glass 179). At another level, *Gould's Book of Fish* is a comic and caustic interrogation of the credibility of history's makers, history as a written text, and the construction of historical accounts. Peter Mews' *Bright Planet* (2004), Kate Grenville's *The Secret River* (2005) and *The Lieutenant* (2008), Kim Scott's *That Deadman Dance* (2010), and Rohan Wilson's *The Roving Party* (2011), while all very different in scope and style, are other examples of historical novels that acknowledge the Australian colonial landscape as alive with indigenous peoples, stories, place

names and cultures. In short, Mabo's recognition of the fact that Indigenous Australians were always on the land and that they owned it has prompted a re-exploration of the terrain of first contact by authors of historical fiction.

One historical novel, which both documents the "darkest aspect of the history of [the] nation" (*Mabo* 82) at the same time as it critically scrutinises discourses of history – and which has received relatively little scholarly attention – is Liam Davison's third novel, *The White Woman*, published in 1994.¹ Davison (1957-2014) will write no more. In July 2014, he was on board Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 when it crashed after being shot down over war-torn eastern Ukraine, killing all 283 passengers and 15 crew. In a short obituary, the editors of the journal *Antipodes* mourned the death of "the novelist and short story writer Liam Davison" as an important loss to Australian literature (Editors 262). They made special mention of *The White Woman* as "one of the most subtle fictional explorations of questions of race, gender, identity, and colonialism in the Australian fictional landscape" (262), suggesting this particular novel may be the one Davison will be remembered for.

Frontier Violence in the Gippsland

The story of the captive white woman of the Gippsland, which forms the basis of Davison's historical novel, is an extraordinary tale of how rumour and myth can be used to invoke rage among isolated white settlers, and how it can ultimately be used to justify murder on the colonial frontier. Published just two years after the Mabo decision, *The White Woman* is a novel that seeks, in broad terms, to document stories of the violent dispossession of Aboriginal people from the Gippsland region of eastern Victoria. In this context, then, *The White Woman* can be read as one of the first historical novels published in the wake of the High Court's call in Mabo for an

¹ Only one scholarly article has been published on this novel (see Fletcher). Beyond this, a few scholars have examined *The White Woman* in the context of wider investigations into other subjects (see Behrendt; Carr; Probyn 1999; and West-Pavlov), and Fiona Probyn has published an interview with Davison about the writing of his novel (Probyn 1996).

“acknowledgement of [...] past injustices” with regard to the “dispossession and oppression of the Aboriginals” (*Mabo* 82). According to Gillian Tyas, “Davison's work brings the past into a continuous present with an intensity that renders the white woman legend immediately relevant” (163). It is worth briefly recounting the establishment of the myth of the white woman of the Gippsland before proceeding with an examination of Davison's text.

On 28 December 1840, a letter appeared in the *Sydney Herald* – and was reprinted a month later by a Melbourne newspaper (Carr 3) – that was to irrevocably alter the lifestyle of the Kurnai, the Aboriginal people of what is now Gippsland. The letter was written by the noted Gippsland explorer and pioneer pastoralist, Angus McMillan, a man who was also later implicated in a number of killing raids on the Kurnai. (One Gippsland historian refers to McMillan, rather unceremoniously, as “Our Founding Murdering Father” [Gardner 1987: 1]). McMillan's letter reported his discovery of a large number of European articles at a Kurnai camp in bushland near the coast, including clothes “besmeared with human blood,” towels, blankets, British money, a blacksmith's tools, bottles, a kettle and various newspapers. McMillan also reported finding “a large lock of brown hair, evidently that of a European woman” as well as the “dead body of a male child about two years old,” which a doctor in his party had examined and “discovered beyond doubt its being of European parents” (qtd. in Carr 5).

McMillan wrote that as his party approached the camp, the “twenty-five black natives, chiefly women” all ran away. His letter continued:

We observed the men with shipped spears driving before them the women, one of whom we noticed constantly looking behind her, at us, a circumstance which did not strike us much at the time, but on examining the marks and figures about the largest of the native huts we were immediately impressed with the belief that the unfortunate female is a European – a captive of these ruthless savages [...] we have no doubt whatever but a dreadful massacre of Europeans, men, women and children, has been perpetrated by the aborigines in the immediate vicinity of the spot [...] we were forced to return without being enabled to throw more light on this melancholy catastrophe. (qtd. in Carr 5-6)

As the Gippsland historian Don Watson points out, there was no evidence that a massacre had taken place at all. "But massacres of Europeans were to be expected of savages," writes Watson, "and it would have been more surprising if McMillan [...] had not deduced from the scene [he] described that a great bloodletting had taken place" (Watson 1984: 162). However, it was not the massacre that lingered on in the public mind but the more shocking thought that an innocent white woman had been kidnapped and remained at the mercy of "ruthless savages" (ibid.). In the years following the publication of McMillan's letter, as a "war over ownership of territory was waged" between Aborigines and British settlers, in a region where "European control of the land was tenuous" (Darian-Smith 1996: 105), parties of armed men scoured the Gippsland on various quests to find the elusive white woman. She was never found.

Gippsland historian, Peter Gardner, surmises that these search parties were merely "used as an excuse for the brutal hunting (with the overt support of the Government) of the Kurnai people" in the context of frontier war (1987: 49). A number of government officials doubted that the captive white woman existed at all. For Gardner, "The evidence seems to point to the affair being the creation of McMillan's fertile imagination and thus was a hoax of grand proportions" (1987: 48). Whether she actually existed or not, the white woman provided a pretext for raids on Aboriginal camps and for clearing the land of Aboriginal people. As Watson puts it:

A white woman enshrined the highest virtues of civilization, the Aborigines of Gippsland the deepest vices of humanity. No doubt she occupied the minds of the lonely men of Gippsland in a variety of roles. The blacks had stolen one of their women. Nothing could have been so well calculated to bring out the warrior in a man. Civilized squatters became crusaders, and unoffending Aborigines their heathen prey. (1984: 163)

The historian Kate Darian-Smith notes that the story of the white woman of the Gippsland is typical of the kind of captivity narratives that were "a well-known, well-worn and formulaic genre in Western literary tradition" by the 1840s (1993: 17): "Stories of white 'captivity' in Australia emerged from, and reflected, settler anxieties

about racial and gendered interactions in Australia, and within the colonial world more broadly" (Darian-Smith 1996: 99). The White Woman of the Gippsland, says Darian-Smith, was a potent symbol for the citizens of Melbourne and settlers of the Gippsland:

She encapsulated the basic fears underlying the experiences of travel to and colonization of an alien land: shipwreck, enslavement and possibly death at the hands of 'barbarous savages', miscegenation, and severance from and loss of Christian, European culture. She was to be mobilized by the white settlers of the region to further their conquest of the land and its peoples. (1993: 17)

Frontier Violence in *The White Woman*

Davison's *The White Woman* tells the story of a private expedition – known as the De Villiers expedition – that set out from Melbourne in October 1846 to try to find the lost white woman. The De Villiers expedition was the only search party, historians agree, that was not used as a justification for hunting down or capturing Aborigines (see Gardner 1988: 84; Darian-Smith 1993: 27). Davison's fictional narrator was a member of both the De Villiers expedition and a later expedition. He is telling his tale decades afterwards to the son of a man who also took part in the latter search mission. Although no search party ever finds the white woman, the unnamed narrator remains convinced she has always existed. Even as he recounts his story years later, his conviction of her existence has not diminished. In this sense, the white woman is "figurative only" throughout Davison's novel, remaining "the product of delusions of imperial proportions" (Probyn 1996: 59). As deluded as the narrator appears to be, he remains sincere, affecting a sense of righteousness, in wanting to condemn the killings carried out by others under the guise of the search for the white woman. As Davison suggests, in an interview, the narrator is a kind of "vigilante for the moral majority, at least that is what he believes" (qtd. in Probyn 1996: 63).

The narrator quotes from historical documents he has collected as he recounts stories of the various search missions, as well as discoveries of murder on the frontier. In this way, Davison manages to weave selected archival material, including McMillan's 1840 letter

(Davison 54-56) and newspaper reports recounting “the slaughter of the unoffending natives” via “shooting and tomahawking” (104, 105), into the fabric of his fictional narrative.

The most gruesome find made by the search party in Davison’s novel is at the edge of a lake, in a cove the search party called Golgotha. Piles of broken bones lay

half-submerged in the black water beneath our feet. There were more of them tangled in the scrub behind. It was like a charnel house. [...] There was hardly a spot we could put our feet without a hand or a jaw-bone crumbling under us. (64)

The party realises it has stumbled across evidence of a huge massacre of people. All of the victims had been “shot or beaten to death with heavy sticks. There was a group of them locked together like a broken cage” (66). However, once the search-party members discover the bones are “black” (67), they merely take note of the discovery and move on. Thus, as Russell West-Pavlov points out, the members of the search party become “only too aware of their complicity in the atrocities committed by the local settlers” (83).

Evidence of a large massacre of Aboriginal people at the fictional Golgotha in *The White Woman* is an oblique reference to what is known as “Gippsland’s most bloody massacre,” the 1843 slaughter of a hundred or more Kurnai at Warrigal Creek (Bartrop 200). The massacre was carried out by a posse of settlers in response to the killing of a prominent Scottish settler by Aborigines. Angus McMillan is said to have organised the revenge attack, warning the party of about twenty “that their mission had to be carried out in utmost secrecy” (Bartrop 201). The son of an early pioneer of the district, William Hoddinot, later reported that McMillan’s brigade, upon finding a large group of Aborigines camped at a waterhole, surrounded it and continued shooting for “as long as their ammunition lasted” (qtd. in Bartrop 201). Many who sought cover in the waterhole were shot as they came up for breath. Bodies were later dumped in the waterhole. Years later, the bones of some of the victims were still to be found there (Elder 87).

Davison's novel foregrounds these and other stories of the destruction of Kurnai society and specifically lays the blame for much of this destruction squarely at the feet of the first settlers of the Gippsland.² In other words, in Davison's frontier fiction, the Aborigines are not portrayed as merely having 'died out' due to the spread of European diseases; they are not portrayed as simply 'fading away' into the bush with the encroachment of pioneering settlers. Instead, the text points to settler complicity in frontier murder. In extended passages, the narrator reports on how the Kurnai were hunted down, in planned, calculated killing raids:

Groups of men set out against the blacks – not spontaneous eruptions of violence, but calculated, well-planned expeditions. Sorties, hunts, call them what you want. They had a purpose. [...] They went well-armed: carbines, muskets, lengths of rope. All sworn to secrecy. Compatriots in arms. And they knew what they were doing. They knew the terrain: where to find the blacks, which way to drive them; the confluence of rivers, the sharp escarpments of stone which served as natural traps.

Oh yes, despite the secrecy and pacts, word still got out. Some men can't help but boast. They tally up the numbers: a dozen here, thirty at the Ridge, a score at Lindenow (a good day out.) And the names: Boney Point, Butcher's Creek, Slaughterhouse; they echoed around Melbourne, resonant with cries and shots and screams, until we couldn't help but hear [...] *Massacre, Massacre*, passing from mouth to mouth in a persistent, unavoidable whisper. (Davison 37)

The stories the narrator is telling – he is telling his tale, within the framework of the novel, around the end of the nineteenth century – are stories that 'white' Australian society (at that time) was working hard to forget or suppress or was replacing with more ennobling stories of settler-pioneer achievement. But these "more unsettling" stories, the narrator reminds his younger listener,

² This is not to say that the Kurnai were completely destroyed or have lost their connection to country. Julie Carr makes note of this in her book on narratives of the White Woman of the Gippsland (197). As well, Albert Mullett, an East Gippsland Aboriginal elder, in a preface to one of Peter Gardner's histories (Gardner 1988), stresses that "the Aboriginal race did not pass away as many people think. In spite of what happened, we survived" (Mullett).

still linger after all these years, snippets of gossip, part hearsay, part conjecture, but always with the possibility of truth behind them; things about ourselves so far outside the realm of acceptability we couldn't hope to face them [...] Instead, they [run] like a dark, heretical undercurrent beneath us. (36)

At the time Davison's novel was published, in 1994, that "dark, heretical undercurrent" had been exposed by both the pronouncement of the Mabo decision, two years previously, as well as the Native Title Act passed by the Australian parliament in 1993. Both had officially acknowledged – first in legal and then in political terms – that Aborigines had been wrongfully dispossessed of lands they had originally owned. But Davison's novel is one of the first to so explicitly thematise the organised nature of the violence of that dispossession in fiction. 'White' Australian fiction writers, to that point in time, had not generally confronted their readers so directly with white-settler culpability in frontier murder. Indeed, the discourse of culpability to be found in Davison's novel ("Groups of men set out against the blacks [...]. And they knew what they were doing") echoes that of Prime Minister Paul Keating's 1992 Redfern Park address, in which he famously declared: "We committed the murders" (Keating n.d.). In other words, the political discourse of Keating admitting to white murder on the historical frontier finds fictional voice, a short time later, in Davison's historical narrative. As Julie Carr notes, *The White Woman* "presents a critique of frontier violence which resonates in contemporary politics" (255).

Questioning History as Discourse

What Davison's novel also seeks to do, through its narrative structure, is to contest the ways in which histories of the frontier are constructed, remembered (or forgotten), and recounted for the benefit of national history. The first-person, old-man narrator still has memories, as well as a number of "yellowed clippings" from newspapers (144), in order to be able to recount his tale for his younger listener. At the very beginning of the novel the strength of eyewitness memory in history making is emphasised in emphatic terms: "You come here asking about your father [...]. Do I

remember the things we did? The answer's yes, and yes, and yes again" (1). The narrator/eyewitness insists on the veracity of his tale for the next generation. But he is equally aware, also early in the recounting of his tale, that talking about the past is problematic, because despite the advantages of hindsight,

[things] don't unfold before your eyes. You have to give it shape. And even when you think you've got it nailed – the right events in the clearest possible order – it squirms into the present and changes things. It should be settled but it isn't. (3)

History, in Davison's text, is *not* held up as "imperial" or "diorama history," to use Paul Carter words (xvi, xx), wherein history becomes "a theatrical performance [...], which reduces space to a stage" (Carter xiv, xvi). Instead, in *The White Woman*, history is a tale given shape by a teller, a tale that will not remain set, neatly situated forever in time and place. Davison's projection of history thus emphasises history's indebtedness to *narrative*, history as emplotted story rather than as mere chronology of past events. The historian Hayden White outlines the spectrum of views on the "function of the imagination in the production" of history in his seminal essay, "The Question of Narrative in Contemporary Historical Theory" (33). He argues that "narrativization" produces meaning "by means that are poetic in nature. Which is to say that the narrative code [in history writing] is drawn from the performative domain of poesis rather than that of noesis" (19). Linking historical discourse so closely to the discourse of poesy is, as White concedes, hotly debated among historians (1). Of course, Davison's historical fiction does not need to attend to such debates. His novel "points to the constructedness of history and the unreliability of its accounts" (Probyn 1999: 53).

As the narrator nears the end of his story, he more openly concedes he has "tangled with the past" in his "searching for the truth," confronted by "the sleight of hand, the slow process of forgetting and inventing. History! Truth, you say. More the practised art of illusion" (Davison 105). It is significant that the narrator/eyewitness of this frontier history is passing on his story, at the end of the nineteenth century, to a generation who will be the founders of a

new Australian nation after 1901. The generation of the un-named, silent listener in Davison's historical novel will write the first official histories of Australia in the twentieth century. The old-man narrator knows that the tale he has recounted of an excessively violent frontier is unpalatable, unwelcome, unwanted, and is likely to go unheeded. His parting words to his young listener are:

It's not the history you wanted, is it? Not the past you'd choose. Still, it's easily forgotten. I'm an old man; dementia in the family. You could write your own for all I care and, when it comes to it, no one need ever know [...]. And when I'm gone ... Yes, when I'm gone ... Well, you've got your story ... and when we're said and done, that's all there really is. (154)

Davison's novel is thus framed by a beginning that insists on strong memories of frontier violence and an ending that highlights a wilful forgetfulness as the nation of Australia is being formed. The "dementia in the family" of a generation who experienced the frontier becomes the structural dementia of a nation no longer willing to recount unsavoury, wholly inglorious tales of the robbery of land and indiscriminate murder. As well, the last paragraph of Davison's novel also speaks to the contemporary reader: this history of the frontier is not a history that is wanted; it is not a past that anyone would choose to be proud of. But it is one that Australians are again being confronted with, post Mabo.

Admitting to Committing Murder

There is another interesting link between Liam Davison's novel of Gippsland history and Paul Keating's historical Redfern Park speech: Don Watson. Watson is a historian who wrote one of the first critical histories of British settlement of the Gippsland (*Caledonia Australis*, published in 1984). In 1992, he became Prime Minister Paul Keating's speechwriter, and it was he who is credited with having written Keating's famous Redfern Park speech.³

³ It should be noted that Paul Keating disputes his former speechwriter's claim to "authorship" of the Redfern Park address. In a 2002 biography of Keating, Don Watson wrote that the Prime Minister read the Redfern Park

Watson's book about the settlement of the Gippsland by Scottish highlanders was a history which "emphasised the violent means by which Europeans [...] took possession of the land" (Carr 198). The role of the legend of the captive white woman of the Gippsland in precipitating the destruction of Kurnai society was a central theme in the chapter Watson devoted to Kurnai dispossession. Watson's history dispenses with euphemism to declare that the settlers engaged in murder:

Far from being inevitable, the destruction of Kurnai society was gratuitous and grotesque [...] It was too often murder for the whites to call it war, which is why they called it nothing at all and preferred to forget than to contemplate treaties. (Watson 1984: 183)

It is this discourse of forgetting – and not only of destruction – that lies at the centre of Davison's *The White Woman*. Eight years after Watson's Gippsland history was published, his historical text became political speech in the form of the words he wrote for Paul Keating. An admission of white culpability in the killing of Aboriginal people and the stealing of Aboriginal lands was now to be uttered publicly by Australia's Prime Minister: "It was we who did the dispossessing. We took the traditional lands and smashed the traditional way of life [...] We committed the murders" (Keating n.d.). It was the histories written by researchers like Watson that influenced the judges in the Mabo case, who then created the space for politicians like Keating to admit to the previously unmentionable. Davison's 1994 novel might now be read as the first post-Mabo work of fiction to make such similarly forceful utterances.

speech that he, Watson, had written for him "and went to Redfern Park with every word intact" (Watson 2002: 290). In a 2010 newspaper article, Keating does not dispute that Watson wrote the words that he as Prime Minister read out, but he voices his annoyance at Watson's continuous and uncontested claims to have authored the speech: "The sentiments of the speech, that is, the core of its authority and authorship, were mine" (Keating 2010).

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