

AUSSIE BATTLER IN CRISIS? SHIFTING CONSTRUCTIONS OF WHITE AUSTRALIAN MASCULINITY AND NATIONAL IDENTITY

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Abstract

In the last decade, the white 'man in crisis' – a prominent figure in American society – has entered the Australian cultural conscious, and now begins to challenge the position of the 'Aussie battler' as the dominant version of Australian masculinity. This paper investigates the implications of this shift for Australian national identity – a construction historically and contemporaneously tied to white male identity – by exploring the manifestation of the 'man in crisis' in current political and popular debates, before moving to consider the ways in which these debates emerge and are affirmed and transformed in contemporary Australian women's fiction.

Specifically, I argue that in the popular and political arenas, the identities of the Aussie battler and the man in crisis currently exist in tension. Some contemporary Australian women's fictions, like Jillian Watkinson's *The Architect*, resolve this conflict by privileging of the man in crisis to the exclusion of the Aussie battler. Although such narratives appear to offer a more sensitive and emotional model of masculinity, closer analysis evinces the sexist, racist and homophobic undertones of this emerging phenomenon within Australian fiction and society. Other contemporary Australian women's fictions, such as Fiona Capp's *Last of the Sane Days* and Sarah Myles's *Transplanted*, depict and engage with both the man in crisis and the Aussie battler to produce a refiguring of Aus-

tralian identity in ways that depart from the longstanding affiliation of nationhood with masculinity. Yet despite their reconfiguration of gender, these contemporary Australian women's fictions continue to imagine Australian identity in terms of whiteness.

Introduction

Over the last decade, the white male victim, or the 'man in crisis' – a prominent figure in American society – has entered the Australian cultural conscious, and now begins to challenge the position of the 'Aussie battler' as the hegemonic construction of Australian masculinity. This shift has important implications for national identity, for as R.W. Connell asserts, "It is by now a familiar observation that notions of Australian identity have been almost entirely constructed around images of [white] men" ("Introduction" 9).

This paper investigates this shift, paying particular attention to its manifestation in current political and popular debates, before moving to consider the ways in which these debates emerge and are affirmed and transformed in contemporary Australian women's fiction. Although this conjunction of Australian masculinity, national politics and women's fiction is unusual in many respects, the treatment of masculinity in these arenas is at times remarkably similar, and at others significantly different, and thus offers a useful matrix for gauging and unpacking contemporary gender discourses. The use of

women's fiction as a source in such debates also permits the inclusion of a perspective on white Australian masculinity (and for that matter, on national identity and politics) seldom considered: that of women. For, to expand Connell's statement, in Australia white men have overwhelmingly constituted not only the figures in, but the commentators on, national identity. Concurrently, an analysis of the distinctions and associations between the white male victim within Australian national politics and contemporary women's writing, and between the Australian and North American contexts, challenges a conception of whiteness as monolithic and enables an insight into its various national and international translations and translocations.

By discussing current constructions of white Australian masculinity, especially in relation to the political personas of John Howard and Mark Latham, I will argue that in popular and political debate, the identities of the Aussie battler and the man in crisis currently exist in tension. Some contemporary Australian women's fictions resolve this conflict by privileging of the man in crisis to the exclusion of the Aussie battler. Although such narratives may seem to offer a more sensitive and emotional model of masculinity, an analysis of Jillian Watkinson's *The Architect* evinces the sexist, racist and homophobic undertones of this emerging phenomenon within Australian fiction and society. Other contemporary Australian women's fictions, like Fiona Capp's *Last of the Sane Days* and Sarah Myles's *Transplanted*, depict and engage with both the man in crisis and the Aussie battler to produce a refiguring of Australian identity in ways that depart from the longstanding affiliation of nationhood with masculinity.

Yet despite their reconfiguration of gender, these contemporary Australian

women's fictions continue to imagine Australian identity in terms of whiteness. Although they are contradictory in many ways, both the Aussie battler and the man in crisis are regularly evoked in discussions of Australian politics and national identity. In *Ozwords*, the Australian National University's online dictionary of Australian words, Frederick Ludowyk identifies the Aussie battler as the central icon of Australian masculinity in the twentieth-century. Moreover, he insists that, although the term has had different inflections,¹ the Aussie battler at the beginning of the twenty-first century is still the person of Henry Lawson's tradition, a man who "with few natural advantages, works doggedly and with little reward, who struggles hard for a livelihood, and who displays enormous courage in so doing" (7).² Ludowyk overlooks one important characteristic of the battler in this definition: his whiteness. Relatedly, Mary O'Dowd asserts that this stereotype of Australian masculinity arose from the construction of Australia itself as "an enemy, a land to be conquered and transformed" (4) – an imaginary that occluded "the real conflict" between settlers and Indigenous people (1).

Accordingly, the origins of the Aussie battler can be located in the familiar narratives and images of explorers, colonists and farmers doing battle with drought, heat and distance. The notion of the land as the primary site of the battler's struggle has continued, despite the fact that relatively few Australians now live in the bush. The perpetuation of this narrative is facilitated by a slight shift in the conception of land and the battle: today, the banks are often a principal adversary, though this occurs because the battler has lost the contest with the environment (or with interest rates) and is threatened with losing his land.

The continuing importance of the Aussie battler to Australian identity is evident in the frequency of references to this figure in public and political debates. Although predominantly used to describe men – particularly working-class men, sporting 'heroes' and farmers – the term is also employed in a number of figurative ways. 'Aussie battler' is used by politicians and political commentators from across the domestic spectrum to demonstrate awareness of the difficulties faced by 'ordinary' Australians, and even to describe Australia's relationship to the international community.³ The prevalence and variety of references to the Aussie battler in political discourse aptly demonstrates the way in which conceptions of white masculinity continue to organise and define Australian national identity.

While the icon of the battler remains central, the contradictory discourse of a crisis in masculinity is increasingly prominent in public and political debates about the position of men in contemporary society. Two themes dominate such discussions: men no longer have access to, or are unable to fulfil, a masculine role; and men are emotionally disconnected from one another. Consequently, male relationships, particularly those between fathers and sons, are impoverished. Such claims underlie the recent rise in Fathers' Associations and the related perception of the Family Court as a site of male oppression. The notion of a crisis in masculinity was also a significant component of Mark Latham's leadership campaign for the last federal election, specifically his assertions regarding the under-achievement of boys in schools and his association of this trend with a lack of appropriate male role-models. The resonance such ideas attained with the community is evident in the prominence of articles debating the nature and impact of this crisis in masculinity.⁴ Although opinion on the

effect (and indeed, the existence) of this crisis has been somewhat divided, the familiarity with which such ideas are employed testifies to their entry into Australian cultural consciousness.

Increasingly, proclamations of a crisis in masculinity are occurring in the context of depictions of white male bodily harm. This is evident, for example, in an article entitled "Mothers must tell the truth," published in the *Australian March* 2005, in which Janet Albrechtsen attacks women who commit "paternity fraud." This occurs when women conceive children with men other than their partners and these partners consequently support children not biologically their own.

According to Albrechtsen, this "dreadful deception" creates "a web that entraps more men ... than we may care to believe." Instead of allowing women to "go about their deceit without penalty," she argues that the "victims" of such deceit should receive "recompense for expenses ... incurred and for the pain and suffering ... endured" (15). Her claims of male victimisation are accompanied by a drawing of a naked white man being constrained by the thorn-covered stem of a rose as he is consumed, head first, by this flower. Male damage is also depicted in the illustration that accompanies a similar article by John Hirst, published two days earlier in the same newspaper. Entitled "Court rule offensive to families," but with the by-line, "No-fault divorce tends to unfairly target perfectly decent fathers," the illustration depicts a "perfectly decent" white father being beaten across the face by the female figure of justice (7).

This man in crisis differs from the traditional icon of the Aussie battler in a fundamental way. In the battler's life of hardship and struggle, only one thing is never in doubt – his masculinity; indeed the more he struggles, the more his

masculinity is affirmed. In contrast, the man in crisis is feminised by the challenges he faces, a feminisation that is particularly evident in illustrations of bodily harm. To put this another way, whereas the battler "refuses to admit defeat in the face of adversity" ("Battler," def. 1), the assertions of victimisation and disempowerment that characterise the discourse of masculinity crisis represent a call for immediate intervention and assistance: they signify a belief, in other words, that white men face imminent disaster and need the support of public policy to overcome it.

In this sense, the emergence of a discourse of masculinity crisis in Australia might be taken as evidence of the positive and politically productive challenge that feminism (and other identity-based liberationist approaches) have posed to traditional enactments of male power; as evidence, in other words, that white male hegemony is finally collapsing. However, this interpretation overlooks the ways in which both identities function to protect white masculinity from criticism. This function is quite clear in relation to the Aussie battler. As well as providing proof of masculinity, the narrative of the battle allows challenges posed to white male hegemony by changing economic conditions, women and racial minorities to be subsumed into the dominant struggle with the land: challenges to white men's cultural and economic priority are therefore constructed as part of the struggle that supports, constitutes and proves white Australian masculinity. Not only do these other battles consequently diminish in importance, they are framed in relation to, and thereby function in support of, the dominant construction of the white Australian man as battler.

To understand how proclamations of a crisis in masculinity do the same, it is useful to note the resemblance between

the emerging Australian man in crisis and the established discourse of male victimisation prevalent in American media and culture. Although some commentators have identified this American discourse as evidence of the challenge posed to male power by a focus on masculinity and whiteness as topics of discussion and critique,⁵ in many recent analyses the "white male victim" is seen as "an attempt by white men to respond to and regroup in the face of particular social and economic challenges" since the 1960s (Savran 5). Sally Robinson, for instance, argues that the "dominance of ... liberationist rhetoric" (*Marked* 7) in contemporary American society means that claims of victimisation and disempowerment have become a recognised strategy for asserting rights.

Significantly, while white men lack recourse to social inequalities when claiming victimisation, "[b]odily wounds have a persuasive power that does not depend on the social; and images of men's bodies at risk work to legitimise a discourse that often veers off into the apolitical and asocial" ("Men's" 208). In other words, representations of wounded men provide proof of white male claims of victimisation and disempowerment, at the same time as this focus on individual bodies in pain conceals the political, social and institutional privileges still accorded such subjects. Thus, Robinson argues that the cultural prominence and visibility of wounded men in American society "functions as a strategy through which white men negotiate the widespread critique of their power and privilege" (*Marked* 6). Similarly, although the idea of a crisis in masculinity has attracted both supporters and detractors in Australia, when presented in this context of male bodily harm, such claims are overwhelmingly informed by a belief in the actuality of such a crisis, and the need for a com-

mensurate defence of white men's entitlements.

However, arguing that the man in crisis and the Aussie battler both function to support male power does not explain the recent emergence of the discourse of masculinity crisis, and its associated claims of male rights and victimisation, in Australia. Periods in both Australian and American history – typically those characterised by changes in labour, gender and racial relations – have been experienced and theorised in terms of a crisis in masculinity.⁶ Yet although masculinity has been perceived as threatened during such times, it is only in the current period that white men have been seen as deliberately and maliciously targeted, attacked and disadvantaged. In this sense, and as Robinson argues, the figure of the victimised and disempowered white man signals a new conception of racial and gender relations, one that is at least partly common to Australia and America. Yet at the same time, there is a significant temporal difference in the emergence of this discourse of male disempowerment between the two countries: although prevalent in America since the 1960s, it is only since the mid-1990s that the situation of white Australian men has been consistently understood and presented in this way.

Given that identity-based liberationist movements have had a similar influence on social relations and rhetoric in Australia as in America, this is a curious divergence. Why, then, have claims of male victimisation and disempowerment only recently appeared in Australia? The emergence of such claims could be explained as simply another manifestation of Australia's increasing economic, military, political and cultural turn to America. Accordingly, while the entry of the man in crisis into Australian political and popular debates supports Connell's identification of contemporary masculin-

ity as increasingly globalised and homogenised,⁷ it simultaneously suggests a hierarchy within the West: as well as non-Western conceptions of masculinity being subsumed by Western constructs, American discourses of masculinity and nationhood seem to be gaining cultural priority over Australian ones. This account, however, represents too one-sided and simplistic a view of how discourses of whiteness and masculinity are translocated and translated from one country to another.

Rather than a notion of the American cultural juggernaut infringing on and overwhelming a traditional (though of course, not a native) Australian construction of white masculinity, I would suggest a leaching of the discourse of masculinity crisis into Australia. This leaching is enabled by a change, and hence, a receptivity in Australia to a new model of white male hegemony. Many recent debates have made the Aussie battler's relationship with the land more difficult to sustain. Native title has been (nominally) awarded and refugees are seen as invading Australian shores. Environmental debates have likewise disrupted the myth of white men's rights over the land. Potentially, the acceptance and support given by Australia's government to the idea that the West is engaged in a war against terror also creates a fertile ground for the idea that white men are in crisis.

Significantly, this notion of terror simultaneously builds upon and intensifies earlier challenges to the battler mythology: like Indigenous Australians and refugees, terrorists are seen as having 'invaded' Australian soil, threatening to destroy our (read white men's) way of life. The image that became definitive of the Cronulla race riots – of the young white man, draped in an Australian flag with the slogan, "We grew here, you flew here," painted on his body (Hudson) –

signifies a particularly blatant symbol of this juxtaposition of whiteness, masculinity, self-proclaimed suffering and nationalism. The credence given to the idea that the rights of white Australian men have been overwhelmed by the claims of women and other races disrupts the dominant battle narrative underlying and enabling hegemonic constructions of white Australian masculinity. In this context, it is possible that the trope of male damage prevalent in American media and culture offers a more reliable way of upholding white male power and privilege. That is to say, white male struggle is more effectively individualised in the current Australian political and public climate by association with bodily pain rather than with the land.

An effective and relevant way of conceptualising this leaching of the man in crisis into contemporary Australia society is in relation to the political identities projected by John Howard and Mark Latham in the lead up to the last federal election. Howard's "improbably successful self-portrayal as a battler, a man who rejoices in the virtues of 'mateship,' a representative of the average Aussie" (Rundle 7), has been widely acknowledged.⁸ As Judith Brett notes, Howard has worked hard to identify himself with the popular vernacular nationalism of the Australian legend, appearing prominently at the funerals of various bearers of that legend – Don Bradman, Alec Campbell (the last Gallipoli veteran) and most recently Slim Dusty And appearing whenever possible at sporting and military events and commemorations. (5)

This affiliation is often identified as a significant factor in his surprising win in the 1996 federal election, as well as his continuing, and otherwise baffling, popularity with working-class Australians. Yet previous to the last election, Howard's political image was threatened by

Latham who, given his background, represents a far more plausible embodiment of the Aussie battler than Howard.

The resulting leadership campaign was characterised by both politicians' engagement with and negotiation of the rhetorical strategies of the Aussie battler, but also of the discourse of masculinity crisis. On the one hand, Latham's general political approach was designed to appeal to the battler mentality.

Curious in Latham's politics is the focus on power in itself rather than on what power enables one to do. ... What [Latham] is against is the concentration of power in itself, not the uses to which concentrated power is put. Wherever power is concentrated in society, he says, we have to be anti-establishment. (Brett 14)

Latham's approach is curious only if considered apart from the tradition of the Aussie battler. At the same time, and as mentioned above, Latham explicitly affiliated himself with the discourse of masculinity crisis. For instance, in a major speech at the National Press Club he claimed that "our boys are suffering from a crisis in masculinity. As blue-collar muscle jobs have declined, their identity and relationships have become blurred and confused" ("Speech" 25). Howard continued to align himself with the Aussie battler, albeit sometimes "scuttling back to the Liberal's more usual terrain of responsible respectability to moralise about men who swing punches" (Brett 7). Nevertheless, Latham's use of the rhetoric of masculinity crisis – particularly his focus on the problems faced by boys – forced Howard simultaneously to engage with this discourse through policy proposals and funding promises.⁹

As the discourses surrounding the 2004 Federal election help demonstrate, the entry of the man in crisis into Australia

political debates manifests a transformation in notions of Australian masculinity – one that is often assumed in public debate to indicate the introduction of a more sensitive, emotionally-aware and -responsive masculine identity. Yet when conceptualised in terms of Howard and Latham, neither the Aussie battler nor the man in crisis emerges as appealing in terms of a move towards equity and equality in Australia's politics and national identity. Howard's longstanding identification with the Aussie battler is mirrored in his policies, which have long demonstrated the disdain for women, Indigenous peoples and the environment that underlies and informs the history and nature of this archetypal model of Australian masculinity. And although Latham might by some have seemed to embody a more progressive and liberal social and economic approach, his recent autobiography suggests the egotism and spite underlying the supposedly emotionally-aware and sensitive man in crisis.

Ultimately, the appeal of the man in crisis seems to be the same in Australian public discourse as in the United States: although suggesting transformation – and thus deflecting, and protecting masculinity from, traditional challenges or attacks – this wounded figure in fact maintains the focus of national identity on images of white men. This, in turn, allows white men to continue to function as the reference point for understandings of citizenship, justice and truth; indeed, figured as wounded, white men are able, explicitly as well as implicitly, to justify their cultural priority. This re-centring of white masculinity, combined with the recuperative strategies enabled by the figure of the damaged white man, warns against seeing this figure as offering a less restrictive – or indicating an irrefutable challenge to – hegemonic notions of Australian masculinity.

The resonance and reach of this discourse of white male victimisation and disempowerment is apparent in its emergence in an entirely different arena: contemporary Australian women's fiction. Especially since the late 1990s, an emerging group of Australian women writers have produced novels that centralise not only male characters, but their damaged bodies, in ways that specifically evoke the notion of a crisis in masculinity circulating in popular and political arenas.¹⁰ Whereas some of these novels portray white masculinity in different ways to the political and popular realm, others reproduce the recuperative strategies associated with the popular portrayal of the man in crisis. This latter outcome is particularly evident in Jillian Watkinson's novel *The Architect*, which consistently depicts its protagonist Jules in ways that manifest the two dominant themes characterising the discourse of masculinity crisis in Australia: namely, he has lost access to an appropriate masculinity role, and he is emotionally disconnected from other men, especially his sons.

The Architect begins with a motorcycle accident in which Jules is severely burnt. As well as horribly scarring his body (excepting his hands and face), these burns result in him losing his right arm and most of the use of his left. The emasculation implied by this amputation is reinforced by Jules's reiterated association of the loss of his arm with the loss of his identity: "the maiming grows bigger and I grow smaller" (32). In accordance with Joel Sanders's description of "the cultural perception that authors of buildings, like the structures they design, embody the very essence of manhood" (11), Jules's emasculation is compounded by his inability to perform adequately in his job as an architect. The resulting suggestion of a crisis in masculinity is compounded by the novel's focus on difficulties with "father and son stuff" (270). Jules has

two damaged sons: the son he brought up, Che Lai, and his surrogate son Marc (the adult child of his lover, Jan). Jules's estrangement from Che Lai is a great source of anguish. Burnt as a child, Che Lai is severely crippled by scars, and has always blamed Jules for his unhappy life; having resorted to drugs to ease his pain, he is dying from AIDS. Marc was also damaged as a child: thrown from a horse he was riding pillion with his father, he is paraplegic. In a way that perpetuates and compounds both the importance and the complexity of difficulties associated with father and son relationships in this novel, problems in Jules and Marc's relationship are associated with problems between Jules and Che Lai, and Marc and his father.

At first glance, the crisis Jules undergoes seems to offer a more positive model of masculinity than that of the traditional Aussie battler: through suffering he reconnects with and learns to express his emotions, heals the relationships with his sons, and gains access to an authentic masculine identity. Upon closer examination, however, Jules's suffering and healing, and the emotional growth he consequently experiences, are presented in ways that manifest the recuperative strategies characterising the American discourse of male victimisation. As a result, this novel offers an insight into the emergence and the function of these strategies in Australia.

As Robinson asserts, the purported disempowerment and disenfranchisement of white men in America is frequently represented through images of physical pain. These provide evidence of a crisis in masculinity while occluding the social power white men still exercise. Jules's suffering is emphasised in *The Architect* through repeated descriptions of the operations he endures, the skin infections that plague him, and most of all, his "pain and fear" (217). Frequently, his

pain is so extreme that it becomes a separate, personified force:

Pain flings me back. Phantom fingers are tangled in the shirt-sleeve under my sweater. The ragged ends of nerves set me alight. Hot agony becomes a throbbing; it spreads in waves of reminiscence across the scars and I am caught in that vortex where nightmares and memories are inseparable. (46)

The affective impact of representations of physical pain encourages sympathy for Jules, as do passages which demonstrate his helplessness and vulnerability. A particularly poignant series of images amass around the association of his burns with physical limitation and constraint. His scars "shrink and grow tight as they mature." Soon, he admits, "I will not be able to lift my head to see the sky" (89). Even attempts to allow him more movement – freedom – produce their own constraints. His "utter helplessness" is represented at one point by his confinement within "a moulded body cast," which "imprisons his arm to the wrist and his torso to the waist" (116).

The emotional pain Jules experiences as a result of his injuries is imbued with such pathos that it comes to achieve the status of existential crisis. He feels, for instance, that his identity is obliterated by "the elongated, asymmetrical shadow of my body" that "blots out all the other images I have of Jules van Erp" (40). His inability to perform simple tasks similarly threatens his identity. When his nurse ties his shoelaces, "the kettle in the kitchen began to whistle and it was the sound of my soul screaming" (36). Later, when his shoelaces come undone, Jules laments:

All the shoelaces ever tied are coming undone. They bind the scaffold that holds the Self. They are unknitting, unravelling, snaking free, and I am watching my own disintegration with a mixture of fear and indifference (42).

Sympathy for Jules's suffering is further encouraged by descriptions which allow him to appropriate and surpass the pain of socially and politically marginalised others – even when he is the cause of that suffering. This process is evident in his relationship with Chloe, a blind woman who is in love with him. Her blindness symbolically disempowers her, and such subjugation is perpetuated by the fact that her love is unreciprocated. Chloe's blindness also allows Jules to deceive her about his body: as she says, "when one can't see, one just assumes there are two hands." This deception remasculinises Jules, but it also compounds Chloe's pain, leaving her having "never, never felt so fucking blind in all my life!" (69). Not only is Jules not blamed for this suffering, it is ascribed to him. Regarding the lies he tells Chloe about his body, Jules muses:

Always ... I have hidden inside the layers of myself and the habit has lent such ease to the practice that I fail to recognise now the difference between the camouflage and the nakedness, between the deception of planned half-truths and the unplanned lies that are self-deception. (70)

In conflating his lies with self-deception – arising from emotional blindness – he not only appropriates her subjugated position and presents his treatment of Chloe as an unintentional response to his own pain, he centralises his own suffering while marginalising hers. At the end of the novel, Jules's appropriation of Chloe's suffering is completed when he constructs his self-deception as far more damaging and hurtful than the lies he told her: "I used her only to deceive myself" (265).

More contentiously, Jules's appropriation of others' sufferings is further enabled because he is not white. Indeed, the novel contains frequently references to his mixed heritage: his Indo-Chinese

mother and childhood in a Vietnamese village; his Swiss father and education in Europe; and his current habitation in and acculturation to Australia. But Jules performs whiteness consummately. Take, for instance, the following description of his demeanour at the opening of an arts centre he designed, a passage indicative of his portrayal throughout the novel:

He is charming, naturally; boundlessly charismatic, and more – terrifyingly more. He talks politics from art grants to human rights, and it's all done with the evasive but knowledgeable savoir-fair of the professional diplomat. ... He is neither artist nor architect; he doesn't live in a satellite suburb. Nothing so ordinary. He is European nobility. He keeps a private yacht His charm is that of perfect manners, rote-learned, and polished in greater halls than this; the charisma's a blend of self-control and confidence; and experience. He has everyone feeding from the palm of his hand (168)

Jules's equivalent or even super-whiteness is compounded by his construction as "the international person" (264), able to "move between countries as easily as we mortals go for picnics" (74). Yet despite being effectively white, when he first arrives in Australia he is marked as racially and culturally different from the norm. As he recalls,

People stopped to look two times because I was yet very European in my mannerisms. And I think, also, because I am a big man who is too feminine. In this country big men dig ditches and play football. They are not artists. They do not have the eyes of the cat or the accent of a perfume maker. (32)

Miraculously, Jules is able to overcome such racism by learning "not to be too much one thing or too much the other" (32), and it is because he is able to assume the invisible position of the white male subject that he experiences the

visibility that comes with the amputation of his arm as a profound shock.

The incongruous ease with which Jules is able to occlude his racial and cultural heritage only makes sense if it is read as one of the many strategies through which all suffering is insidiously related to and appropriated by his character. As a result of being marked as racially and cultural different, Jules experiences the effects of racism, and is therefore able to understand and own this form of suffering. In turn, and although he somehow avoids the extreme poverty experienced by the rest of his village, he is associated with the sufferings of the "Montagnard people Not Vietnamese, not Chinese. Indigenous ... the ones who get the worst deal all round. The innocent bystanders" (260). Subsequent references to the deaths by napalming of the women and children in his village associate his burns with theirs, superimposing and conflating the radically different contexts of their injuries.

The process by which Jules appropriates the sufferings of women and other races actualises Savran's description of the way the white male victim "is not only feminized by a masochistic identification by implicitly blackened as well." As Savran contends, "this slippage between sexual and racial differences" is one of the main reasons why the white male victim "has such enormous psychic power and is able to accomplish such an extraordinary amount of cultural work" (33). Ultimately, although signalling the presence of this discourse of masculinity in Australia, the prominence of the notion of a crisis in masculinity in *The Architect* contains no interrogation or recognition of the socio-historical power relations in which it thereby participates. Rather, the sympathy created for Jules's position, and the pathos imbued in the loss of his masculinity, encourage the reader to long for his return

to a position of power and authority: for a re-empowerment, in other words, of white masculinity. In this context, Jules's newfound ability to express his emotions becomes merely another way in which his suffering – and hence, his subjectivity – are privileged.

Jules's healing is similarly presented in ways that, while seeming to offer a positive model of masculinity, in fact marginalise women, appropriate the knowledge of other cultures and privilege male subjectivity. Although white female characters help Jules to heal by offering him unconditional and undemanding love and support, ultimately it is his surrogate son Marc who heals him. In part, Marc does so by teaching Jules "about getting in touch with his own body" (251), and thereby helping him to "own," "understand" and eventually overcome "his fear of his damaged body" (244). Such lessons construct the male body as a site of authenticity and as the basis of a self-actualised healing enabled through male bonding and, in particular, father-son connection.

At the same time, Marc's ability to heal Jules arises from his extraordinary psychic abilities, which allow him literally to feel, and hence, to empathise with, Jules's pain. For instance, massaging Jules's back Marc senses "pain ... strongly coloured by anxiety. ... Not sharp pain, but an ache of massive intensity" (243). The origins of such psychic abilities are briefly ascribed to the knowledge and teachings of a woman in Saigon and "an old gypsy" (209). However, the marginalisation of women that occurs through the dominant narrative of male healing is compounded, and racialised, by the fact that these women's psychic powers are appropriated by a man and entirely directed towards healing Jules (an effectively white male character).

Resonating with the idea that contemporary white men can overcome crisis by reconnecting with each other and with their authentic or deep masculine selves, this narrative, as Robinson notes in relation to American texts, resolutely maintains the focus on individual rather than social or political change. And while the text may seem to offer a more positive model of masculinity, Jules's healing and healed relationship with his son, and the access he accordingly gains to an authentic masculinity, in fact privilege male subjectivity and homosociality, and actualise the association between hegemonic constructions of masculinity and whiteness. The reproduction of the rhetoric of masculinity crisis in this and other contemporary Australian women's fictions¹¹ demonstrates the emergence and resonance of this discourse – and its accompanying figure of the wounded man – within Australia and exposes the implicit danger the rhetoric and strategies of masculinity crisis pose to the creation of a more equitable society.

Other contemporary Australian women's novels also depict damaged men in terms that resonate with the discourse of masculinity crisis. Fiona Capp's *Last of the Sane Days* centres on Rafael's intense abdominal pain. Like Jules, Rafael is forced to abandon a stereotypically masculine career as an Air Force pilot. This has left him feeling frustrated, confused and depressed, emotions the discourse of masculinity crisis claims all men experience due to the erosion of their traditional role in contemporary society. As in *The Architect*, this theme of male suffering is elaborated in the context of father-son distance. Rafael is estranged from his father, Gerald, largely because he decided to join the Air Force instead of following in his father's footsteps by managing the family farm. This farm is now failing due to drought, and Rafael's inability to perform his masculine role is

thus mirrored by his father's failure in his similarly masculine profession. When, at the end of the novel, father and son commit suicide – both because they feel abandoned by the women they love – this emphasises their alienation, in general and from each other, while simultaneously presenting the suffering created by a loss of male role, and distance between men, as insurmountable and devastating.

Transplanted, by Sarah Myles, has four main male characters and pivots around a burglary, perpetrated by three of these men (Ross, Ian and Kelvin) at the home of the fourth (Peter). All of these men are damaged. Ian is repeatedly brutalised by and subsequently murders his brother, Ross. Kelvin has been in an horrific truck accident where, among other injuries, his arm was trapped under the sliding truck carriage, his "scapula cracked and ripped at right angles, his face de-gloved" (180). Peter is suffering from severe end-stage heart failure, and there are many descriptions of his damaged and deteriorating body, as well as of the multiple operations he undergoes before he dies. Due to this heart condition – described as a "crisis" (86) – he is "embarrassed that he is not there taking on the role that might be expected of him" (94) of protector and provider. Indeed, he "does not think of the people who have robbed them It is his failure to protect that seems the weakness. That he cannot know or predict. That he cannot take control" (83).

In this text, the associated theme of father-son disconnection extends to all of the central male characters: Peter's father died when he was young and Kelvin's father was abusive and neglectful. However, it is particularly prominent in descriptions of the relationship between Ross and Ian and their father, which involve extended passages detailing Ross and Ian's inability to understand what

their father is saying, and his inability to recognise them. As in *The Architect*, a complex relationship between male damage and emotional distance is elaborated.

Yet although these contemporary Australian women's fictions clearly manifest the discourse of masculinity crisis, they employ it in a different manner to texts like *The Architect*. In particular, whereas the figure of the Aussie battler is absent from *The Architect*, entirely replaced by Jules's masculinity crisis, *Last of the Sane Days* and *Transplanted* present encounters between men in crisis and figures representative of the Aussie battler. Although far less programmatic in their depiction of white Australian masculinity than *The Architect*, the hybridised masculinities that subsequently emerge represent identities which enable, but do not constitute, a more positive and politically productive version of Australian identity. For whereas women are marginalised by both the Aussie battler and the man in crisis, these fictions present versions of Australian identity that are underpinned and enabled by equitable relationships between male and female characters. Nevertheless, although there are allusions in *Transplanted* to the Indigenous owners of Australian land, the pre-eminent concern with the identities of the Aussie battler and the man in crisis in both novels leads to a reinscription of whiteness in the resulting portrayals of Australian identity.

In *Last of the Sane Days*, Rafael attempts to overcome his intense physical pain – and his resulting masculinity crisis – by travelling to Europe and following in the footsteps of Nietzsche. Having received no help from western medicine, he believes that Nietzsche's philosophy of self-overcoming will allow him to resume his career as an Air Force pilot. Coincidentally, while in Europe, he encounters Hilary, his godmother and doctor, who

becomes for a time his lover. Hilary helps Rafael locate places where Nietzsche stayed, and also conducts her own research on the philosopher. Her more pragmatic and distanced perspective on Nietzsche is contrasted with Rafael's almost religious belief in his philosophy and its powers of healing.

This focus on Nietzsche can be interpreted in terms of a deliberate engagement with white Australian identity and literary history. As Veronica Brady asserts, "it has become a truism that Nietzsche is a crucial figure for the understanding of Australian culture" (87). Describing Nietzsche as Australia's "beneficent grand-uncle" (51), Vincent Buckley identifies influential features of his "metaphysics of Will" to dominant notions of Australian masculinity and nationhood. Primary among these is the centrality of the male leader and "metaphysical hero, even as the chief value, against the universe." Commonly conceptualised as a "metaphysical adventurer who in his journey ... asserts the value of his own will, his own integrity, his own exploration" (48), this figure can be taken as an ancestor of the Aussie battler.

Yet in *Last of the Sane Days*, Rafael's adoption of a Nietzschean philosophy – and his consequent affiliation with a battler mentality – do not alleviate his suffering. Instead, he finds respite from his pain in his relationship with Hilary. Moreover, descriptions of their sexual relationship – which repeatedly demonstrate their equality – pose a direct challenge to a conception of masculinity that privileges masculine autonomy and "Will." As a prelude to their sexual relationship, Hilary and Rafael play a game in a hotel foyer where,

as they created more outlandish histories for the guests who passed by, they were at the same time conjuring up a world of their own in which they were agents in

enemy territory with no one but the other to trust (105).

Instead of a master/leader against the world, Hilary and Rafael create an alternative reality based in mutual trust and reliance. Descriptions of their sexual contact during the train journey they take across the Alps again evoke an equitable other world: "Their world shrank to the size of a cabin, to the size of two bodies in a knotted embrace where nothing else mattered" (113).

Although occurring in the context of a European journey that is repeatedly affiliated with Nietzsche's own travels, this image of their knotted bodies offers an explicit alternative to the philosophy of individuality, autonomy and mastery.

Transplanted similarly juxtaposes the wounded white man with another ancestor of the Aussie battler, and indeed, of Nietzsche's metaphysical "Wanderer" (Buckley 48): the explorer. Like Nietzsche, the explorer is an accepted archetype of the national identity and literature.¹² Much of the central part of this novel is occupied by Wendy and Kelvin's journey from Melbourne to Perth. During this journey, Wendy reads to Kelvin from a book about Edward Eyre, tracing his journey across the same land and remarking on the hardships he endured. Emphasis is placed on the cruel irony of the fact that,

Beneath the surface, there are a network of caves, thousands of underground passages which extend to the subterranean caverns, often deep enough to reach the watertable" and create "still, clear lakes(176).

Yet while Eyre's "blind and obsessive purpose" rendered him unable to find these underground lakes, Kelvin can. He takes Wendy there without difficulty, "even when the road was unmarked and almost indistinguishable from the flat desert plain" (178). While this man in

crisis thereby teaches Wendy to see Australia in a different way – a difference seemingly enabled by his distance (both historically and psychologically) from Eyre – Wendy's touch heals Kelvin's physical and emotional wounds. As they stand in this underground pool, her fingers trace his "scar which has not been touched since the hospitalised stitching of silk into anaesthetised skin" (180). This touch causes Kelvin to relive his accident, yet the effect is cathartic: it allows him to mourn for the pain he has experienced, and thus, to begin the recovery process. The description of "water pouring over them as if in some ritualised baptism" (179) reinforces a reading of Wendy's touch in the cave Kelvin finds as offering a new beginning.

This association of Kelvin with vision and Wendy with touch resonates with a certain gendered division of senses: namely, the association of men with vision and women with touch. As Evelyn Keller and Christine R. Grontkowski assert,

The notion that vision is a peculiarly phallic sense, and touch a woman's sense, is, of course, not new. Indeed, it accords all too well with the belief in vision as a 'higher' and touch as a 'lower' sense (207).

Yet in *Transplanted*, neither vision nor touch is privileged. Rather, they are equivalent, and the way Wendy and Kelvin help the other by helping them move towards the sense they are alienated from suggests both reciprocity and complementarity. Due to such reciprocity, Wendy and Kelvin are able to traverse the landscape – presented as a psychological journey through themselves and Australian identity – with symbiotic ease. Their journey would not have been possible for the suffering Kelvin alone; nor was it possible for Eyre, who longed to conquer rather than understand the country, and "foul[ed]

each sacred waterhole for the price of flour" (164).

In these and other ways, *Last of the Sane Days* and *Transplanted* depict wounded white men in the context of, and contrast them with, archetypes of Australian literature and culture, figures that emerge as recognisable ancestors of the Aussie battler. Whereas both the man in crisis and the Aussie battler in different ways affirm the individualised struggle of the white man over all others, these novels challenge these constructions of masculinity by evoking them in the context of equitable heterosexual relationships. Both novels subsequently show these heterosexual relationships failing, implying that this dream of a new masculinity is impossible in the context of current Australian society and its gendered inequalities. Nevertheless, and in stark contrast to *The Architect*, as well as to the male-dominated renderings of white masculinity and national identity in Australian public and political discourse, this re-inscription of hegemonic models of Australian and American masculinities challenges, and offers an alternative to, the longstanding alliance of national identity with myths of masculinity.

Yet while these novels appear subversive in their refiguring of gender inequalities, their privileging of heterosexual relationships between white men and women concurrently reinscribes Australian identity as white. The journeys that dominate both novels unconsciously expose this process. On the one hand, Wendy and Kelvin's journey across Australia displaces Eyre's previous exploration, and in turn, white men's original invasion of and appropriation of Indigenous land: the act that O'Dowd identifies as the unacknowledged basis of the battler identity. On the other hand, their own journey inscribes another white narrative over the land – one that incorporates women as well as men, but which

has its foundation in a fundamentally white, individualistic romance narrative. This re-inscription of whiteness is even more apparent in *Last of the Sane Days*, in which the imagining of Australian identity occurs through the established trope of a journey to Europe. The occlusion of Australia's Indigenous heritage inherent in this strategy is compounded by the journeys – imaginary and actual – that Hilary takes when she returns to Australia after Rafael's suicide. The first of these occurs in a dream where

... she was flying with Eva over the out-back. ... [T]hey came to a small community in the middle of nowhere with just a few houses and an airstrip like a dirty cream bandage on the red, red earth. ... Hilary was struck by the feel of the ground, which had the texture of flesh. The bandage of the airstrip was curling at the corners and as she bent down to tease it away, she grew afraid of what she might find. But instead of a weeping wound she uncovered a pearly scar, its edges still slightly inflamed. (253-54)

The flight central to this dream is not incidental to the sense of healing portrayed, but suggests that Hilary is able to fulfil Rafael's dream of a return to the skies, and in doing so, to reclaim his lost identity in a way that again signifies a unity between men and women. Yet while the positioning of this healing of gender inequalities on the Australian land consolidates the novel's engagement with national identity, Hilary's dream overwrites the original wound of Australian nationality: the invasion of Indigenous land. The racism contained in this strategy is consolidated by Hilary's subsequent flight over Rafael's family's farm. Healing is again represented in relation to the land and the airstrip – here, in the way that "the airstrip was overgrown and absorbed into the fabric of the grass." The healing of this wound allows new life to occur, but the form that this new life takes is one that re-enacts the white appropriation of In-

digenous land: "Already subdivision had taken place and a network of bitumen courts and streets had been laid out to create yet another seaside estate" (255).

Transplanted and *Last of the Sane Days* challenge the traditional affiliation of Australian national identity and masculinity. In the contrast thereby established between these texts and public and political debates, as well as novels like *The Architect*, they indicate the extent to which gender divisions continue to underpin Australian identity and culture.

At the same time, and in accordance with the dominant discourse, *Transplanted* and *Last of the Sane Days* privilege whiteness in their constructions of national identity. Indeed, these texts, like *The Architect*, seem entirely unaware of the ambivalence – in terms of sexuality as well as race – of their refiguring of Australian identity in relation to heterosexual relationships between white women and men. In itself, this lack of awareness indicates the continuing dominance and invisibility of whiteness in Australia, a dominance that is presumably perpetuated by the current credence given in this country to images and claims of white male victimisation.

But whereas the discourse of a crisis in masculinity reaffirms the affiliation of masculinity, whiteness and national identity, the privileging of whiteness in these contemporary women's fictions indicates "the complicated axes of power and position, of opposition and complicity occupied by white women in ... Australia" (Kossew 7).

In exposing the unconscious complicity of women – and indeed, of women who write self-consciously feminist narratives – in the marginalisation and oppression of the narratives and subjectivities of non-white others, these fictions confirm the

continuing need for analyses of Australian identity and culture that are attuned to social power relations in ways that extend beyond the issue of gender.

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Endnotes

¹ Until the 1950s, the term, Aussie battler, was also used to refer to itinerants, men who earned a meagre living at the race tracks, and prostitutes (Ludowyk 3-5).

² Ludowyk identifies Henry Lawson's *While the Billy Boils*, published in 1896, as the first literary reference to the Aussie battler (7).

³ Ludowyk notes that the phrase, "little Aussie battler," has been employed to describe the struggle of the Australian dollar against the mighty Greenback and the success of small Australian businesses in spite of the power and reach of international corporations (10).

⁴ During February and March, 2004, literally hundreds of articles on the notion of a crisis in masculinity were published in Australian newspapers. For example, in the *Australian* during February 2004, a prominent series of articles were published all debating the impact of this purported crisis on the well-being of boys and the status of fathers (Bachelard and DiGirolamo; Carr-Gregg; Costello; Editorial; Legge).

⁵ Theorists who adopt such a position include Simpson (*Male*), Segal (*Slow*), David Morgan (73-74) and Anthony Rotundo.

⁶ In America, crises in masculinity have been identified in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries (Michael Kimmel, Melissa Dabakis) and in the post-World War Two period (Kaja Silverman). For discussions of historical crises in Australian masculinity see Martin Crotty and Richard White.

⁷ Connell is one of the foremost theorists of the new globalisation of masculinity (see, for instance, *Men* 46-56, "Masculinities" and "Preface").

⁸ James Walter, for instance, describes the battler mythology as Howard's "political imaginary" (7), while Ludowyk asserts, "In a common reading of recent Australian political history, the battlers have switched political allegiance and are now 'Howard's battlers'" (9).

⁹ The Howard government responded to Latham's popularity on the issue of an educational crisis for boys with the idea of a Boys' Education Lighthouse Schools scheme – designed to provide funding for schools attempting to address the problem of boys' education – and the Success for Boys program. More contentiously, the Coalition introduced legislation to amend the Sex Discrimination Act so that more male teachers could be recruited to counteract the perceived gender imbalance among teachers (Saulwick and Muller 23-24).

¹⁰ Such novels include Kirsty Machon's *Immortality* (1996), Patti Miller's *Child* (1998), Fiona Capp's *Last of the Sand Days* (1999), Jillian Watkinson's *The Architect* (2000), Georgia Blain's *The Blind Eye* (2001), Vivienne Cleven's *Bitin' Back* (2001), Mireille Juchau's *Machines for Feeling* (2001), Sarah Myles's *Transplanted* (2002) and Wendy Scarfe's *Miranda* (2002).

¹¹ Georgia Blain's *The Blind Eye* follows many of the same strategies as *The Architect*, presenting the damaged male protagonist in ways that privilege male suffering and subjectivity, marginalise women and present a homosocial solution to masculinity crisis. Indeed, the strangest aspect of *The Architect* – the use of psychic powers to demonstrate understanding, connection and empathy between men – finds its echo in the portrayal of homeopathy in Blain's novel, in which the most important relationship occurs between Silas, the protagonist, and his homeopath Daniel. Like Marc with Jules, Daniel is able to heal Silas's terrible, internal burning because he can literally feel Silas's physical and emotional suffering by touching him (47-8; 206).

¹² Paul Genoni has recently demonstrated the centrality of themes of exploration, mapping and geography to Australian fiction.