
Narrating the 'Other' at War: The Pacific War and the Japanese in Australian Literature

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In *Narrating the Other: Australian Literary Perceptions of Japan*¹⁾, I tried to show how the Japanese people had been described in Australian literary works from the last quarter of the 19th century to the end of the 20th century. During the course of this research, it became clear that representations of Japan and Japanese people, the unknown 'other' for Australians in the early years, were dominated by specific stereotypical images—some of which include feminine 'Madame Butterfly' characters in romances and masculine 'possible enemy' characters in the invasion scare novels. Before the occurrence of any real interactions between these two countries, double standards were common and exoticism was often exaggerated both in literature and journalism. Because of the 'White Australia' policy, real contact between the people of Japan and Australia was virtually nil before the Second World War, with notable exceptions being the northern pearling communities of Broome, Darwin and Thursday Island.²⁾ Thus images of the Japanese in Australian writings were often created out of a mixture of imagination, desire, fear and the prejudices held by Australian people.

There were however some scholars such as James Murdoch, and authors such as Rosa Praed, who in their diasporic circumstances, away from home and in Japan, had the opportunity for a closer look at Japan and the Japanese. Murdoch spent time as an English professor at various Japanese tertiary institutions including Tokyo University, and eventually wrote a history of Japan in three volumes, as well as many novels and short stories. His scholastic knowledge of Japan eventually led him to the position of the first professor of Oriental Studies at Sydney University in 1918. Praed was one of the first authors who used Japan as a setting, who actually visited Japan. Although it was only as a stepping stone to Europe, Praed's short stay in Japan enabled her to observe the country and the people and write a less conventional novel, about the audacious relationship (for those days) between an Eastern man and a Western woman.³⁾

Both writers were free from the banal versions of Orientalist discourse of the time and produced unique writings on Japan. However, such writers were a minority. Until the

outbreak of the Pacific War, Australian representations of Japanese people at home were limited by the extent of writers' (and readers') imagination, and tended to range from stories with romantic settings to political or journalistic novels warning of a possible Japanese invasion. These invasion novels especially gave Australian people grim pictures of what it would be like if Japan tried to invade Australia.⁴⁾

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The Second World War (Pacific War), when the Japanese became a real foe, offered the first opportunity for Australian people to see the until now imagined enemy at close quarters. The Pacific War between Japan and Australia, and their allies, was fought in close proximity to the Australian continent, something which had never occurred before in the history of Australia. This war caused many cases of displacement, misplacement and dislocation for both sides. A possible attack by the unknown enemy, the battle against them, escape and refuge, and captivity for some, were no longer the product of an imagination created by anxious and nationalistic journalists or politicians but had become a reality. For the first time, during jungle warfare in South East Asia and New Guinea, ordinary Australians were able to see the Japanese at a close distance. Paradoxically and ironically, it was also at this time when Australians first realised their long-feared enemy was not something monstrous as the authorities had warned, but were human beings, just like them. An illustration is T.A.G. Hungerford's description of a scene in which a group of Australian soldiers accidentally come across Japanese soldiers bathing in the river. For one of these soldiers, it was the first time he had seen a Japanese "unarmed, undressed, helpless, playing", which made him afraid with "a strange new fear".⁵⁾ In another example, Russell Braddon, taking the enemy's perspective in his war memoir-novel, describes an episode in which an Australian soldier hesitates as he tries to kill a Japanese soldier, for the soldier was singing the familiar tune of 'Auld Lang Syne'. The Australian soldier, through an unexpected encounter with a familiar and shared 'memory', experiences a sense of revulsion at having to kill the no longer 'alien' enemy. But when he does carry out his duty, the Japanese soldier also understands why the Australian soldier has to destroy a man who sings.⁶⁾

Initially Australians were fighting against Japan's imperialism in East Asia, but eventually they also started to realise that they themselves were fighting for another form of imperialism. Examples of this realisation can be found in Eric Lambert's *The Dark Backward* (1958) or Jon Cleary's *The Long Pursuit* (1967). Interactions with the enemy 'other' gave Australians the opportunity to not only know the human side of the enemy, but also to think twice about the 'cause' of the war in which they took part without much questioning.

The Cowra prisoners of war breakout in August in 1944 was an important episode for Australian people in the changing and growing understanding of the 'other'. It has often been described as a suicidal action in which the prisoners tried to escape from captivity with little prospect of success. For many, this incident suggested ways in which Japanese prisoners saw themselves, dislocated from where they should be—the battlefield. This dislocation through 'prisoner-hood', led to an immense feeling of shame, shame based on the belief that they were living a seeming peaceful and safe life, safely away from the horrors of war that their comrades were facing; a shame that led to a belief that the only escape was through death, as Hugh Clarke's title *Escape to Death* shows.⁷ This event provided Australians with a new perspective on the Japanese—a perspective which revealed how Japanese soldiers, by being prisoners in Australia, could culturally and circumstantially be marginalised, itself a reflection of their military code.

One of the first novels which depicted Australian reactions to the attempted breakout was Kenneth Mackenzie's *Dead Men Rising*⁸. This novel reveals Australians' feelings of bewilderment and incomprehension towards their prisoners. Later writers such as Clarke and Harry Gordon, who literally dug up official documents when they became available, researched further to try and better understand the reasons for their behaviour.⁹ But the question of why they did what they did, is still being asked by both sides. Recent examples include the 2008 film "Broken Sun" in Australia and the Japanese TV drama on the Cowra uprising in the same year.¹⁰

Unlike the Japanese prisoners of war in Cowra, Australian prisoners of war were enslaved within the war theatre, within very harsh and hard circumstances. These prisoners saw another side of the Japanese, a most atrocious and brutal side. In such an extraordinary situation, many of the Australian prisoners of war were able to have a close look at the 'other', and by doing so, were able to also reflect on themselves, a fact recorded in many memoirs. There were some Australian prisoners who realised that, with a little more knowledge of the enemy Japanese—their language, behaviours and military customs —, they could have been better off, and perhaps even have saved the lives of some of their fellow prisoners. As a result of this understanding, criticism by some of these prisoners was turned to the higher ranks, who were seen as being unable to protect their subordinates or negotiate with the enemy. Examples include Eric Lambert's *MacDougal's Farm*, in which the protagonist laments that "too many officers sought only to retain their status as officers... never has the absurd snobbery and class distinction of the army has been so clearly demonstrated", and "[d]uring the war there was a widespread myth in the British Army that the Australian army was a democratic army.... On the [Thai-Burma] Death Railway that myth died once and for all."¹¹

Some prisoners were sent to Japan, where they had the chance to witness the ordinary Japanese and their life conditions. As Clarke noted, they discovered that the life of

the ordinary Japanese person was not so different from that of prisoners themselves.¹²⁾ Some of these prisoners on Japanese soil witnessed the aftermath of the atomic bombs, which at the time were seen by Australians in generally a positive light as the only way to stop the war. Kenneth Harrison's utterance, "poor, poor, bastards", for the stricken Japanese in Hiroshima when he visited the city just after the surrender of Japan as a freed ex-pow, reveals a sentiment expressed by some faced with the first hand experience in Japan at the time.¹³⁾

After the war, some Australians went to Japan as part of the Occupation Force, and this gave another unique opportunity to observe the Japanese 'other'. They were now the 'master' in the enemy's territory, which added a new dimension to the relationship between the two peoples. Interestingly, writers such as Hungerford and Hal Porter show in their first-hand stories not the triumphant atmosphere of the conqueror, but a certain bitterness created by their contacts with the Japanese people, and furthermore, a reflection of themselves.¹⁴⁾ More recent examples include Steven Carroll's *Momoko*,¹⁵⁾ in which a naïve young Australian, in the uniform of authority as a member of the occupation force, finds it difficult even to gain full attention from a young woman who belongs to the occupied group. He cannot see the other side clearly, thus showing the power relationship does not always work as the empowered one thinks.

For all these writers, their Australian characters were lost in strange circumstances, realising that not only did they not know their enemy, but they also really did not know themselves. And yet in reality, it was through these difficult cross-cultural interactions that they were able to establish an understanding of the 'other' and develop concrete relationships with them. One such example were the Japanese war brides, who were among the first Japanese to be admitted into Australia in 1952, thus becoming the first to break-through the tough immigration policy that existed at the time.¹⁶⁾

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The Pacific War, as has been briefly outlined, provided Australian writers with the opportunities to know the 'other', in this case, the Japanese. It took a major war for Australians to have a better knowledge of the other. And perhaps the reverse was also true, for Japanese to get to know Australians. And yet in the relationship between the two countries after the war, more emphasis has been placed on the economy and diplomacy than culture and history. As a result, the quest for the meaning of war, what actually happened during the war, and what war has meant to both countries and their people, has still not been adequately dealt with, and is still the subject of discussion and writings into the 21st century. Unfortunately, this quest has generally been confined to literary works and some other art forms such as drama and film.

are recent examples in the form of a novel of this searching for answers.¹⁷⁾ Hazzard was the daughter of diplomats, whose postings included China. In her writings, Hazzard has tried to look at the war from the other's side. The protagonist in her novel is a young British officer who has a heroic war record both in Europe and in China, and after the war, he is sent to Japan to write about his observations of the war's aftermath in the area around Hiroshima, an area where the Australian British Commonwealth Occupation Force were stationed. The title the "Great Fire" implies war, air raids and actual fires caused by bombing raids, including the dropping of the atomic bomb. After such devastation caused by war, people of both sides—winners and losers—are left exhausted and deprived. And yet the Western victors try to behave as conquerors, a position that does not seem right to the protagonist who has a broader, more sympathetic perspective than most other western characters. Hazzard's criticism is targeted at the arrogance of the conquerors, power games between the occupation forces and the narrow form of nationalism existing within each group of people. The author tries to emphasise that war and its aftermath had a great impact on all those involved, allies and enemy alike. This great fire almost consumed and destroyed both sides, and yet Hazzard shows that not only the conquerors but also the conquered are able to rise from the ashes with a degree of hope for the future.

Gail Jones, in her novel *Dreams of Speaking*, also takes up the problem of the aftermath of war, especially the impact of the atomic bomb dropped on Nagasaki as one of her sub-themes. The protagonist is an Australian woman who meets an elderly Japanese man. Despite their differences in age, sex, nationality and background, they start to talk about their common interest, modern inventions and technologies, which in turn leads to a degree of mutual understanding between them. Through this communication, written and spoken—the most basic of human communication, the protagonist is made to realise what the atomic bomb means to people in Nagasaki, and eventually becomes drawn to the city when the Japanese man, one of the many victims, passes away. The atomic bomb, one of the most modern inventions, was welcomed by one side as a means of ending the war, but on the other side it also meant the beginning of suffering for many victims and survivors.

In both these novels, the authors try to see the Pacific War not only from their own side, but also from that of the enemy—the 'other'. It is especially interesting to note that they both look at the role of the atomic bomb, and the shift in seeing it from being a necessary means to punish the villain and end the war to the cause of horrors and disasters to innocent people. Their choice to put themselves into diasporic positions, or to become transnational, maybe not fully physically but intellectually and mentally, has enabled them to tell the story from the other's perspectives, a perspective not fully developed in former Australian novels.¹⁸⁾

War created extraordinary circumstances, extraordinary circumstances for Australian people to know what they could not have known otherwise about the 'other'. While war should not be seen as a necessity for people to gain such knowledge, it has played a major role in the relationship between Australia and Japan. There seems to be importance in understanding the effects of war and assessing its impact, as a means to better understand the changing nature of the relationship between Australia and Japan, and indeed between groups of people in general.

An example of this attempt to understand can be seen in Charles Happell's *The Bone Man of Kokoda*¹⁹⁾, in which he traces the story of a Japanese man who, many years after the war, went back to the Kokoda Track to search for the remains of his comrades and eventually stayed there for over twenty years. This ex-Japanese soldier was the sole survivor of his platoon from the Kochi district in New Guinea. The Kokoda campaign in 1942 was an important battle for Australia, as it prevented the Japanese army coming down by the mountain route and capturing Port Moresby. There was heavy fighting between the allied forces and the Japanese in appalling conditions, and after the fierce battle, the Japanese eventually withdrew, nearly annihilated. Happell tries not to judge what happened, but rather tries to understand and describe what drove a man to return to the scene of the battle, collect the bones of his fallen comrades, and send them back to Japan. He tries to understand and describe the impact and effect that this Japanese soldier's actions had upon his own family, and on others, including the local Papuans. This non-fiction story, based on the author's research, is another form of trying to understand the 'other' through the event of war.

From this year, the first Wednesday of September is celebrated as the Battle for Australia Day. The day commemorates the battle for Australia, and the Australian victory over Milne Bay and the Kokoda Track, both events which stopped the Japanese southward movement during the Pacific War. As Prime Minister Kevin Rudd said at the Australia War Memorial on the third of September this year (2008), such a day may 'confirm that they fought as a nation'.²⁰⁾ The impression one gets from such a declaration is that people still need to have something to identify with, to boost their sense of nationalism, and the need for a possible enemy to keep at bay, to protect themselves from, to prove their nationhood. In some ways, this declaration is reminiscent of the imagined foe imagery used by journalists and authors in late 19th and early 20th century, as mentioned at the beginning of this article.

Against such a backdrop, some historians like Peter Stanley, maintain that evidence does not support a plan by Japan to invade Australia.²¹⁾ In fact, Stanley insists it is not right to hang on to the many invasion myths long cherished by Australians.²²⁾ Memories of war, as well as history itself, can be highly politicised by the author who records such

memories. Like history, literary works cannot escape the same fate. The ability of the author to transcend the uni-dimensional, one-sided perspective to take a more multi-dimensional perspective becomes critical to a more balanced account of history.

In this article, it has been argued that the Pacific War offered many Australians a chance to think about the 'other', in this case, the Japanese. From the battlefield to prisoner-of-war camps to the enemy occupied homeland, Australians held attitudes of hatred, fear and incomprehensibility about the enemy Japanese. However, from their attempt to see and understand the difference between them and the other, representations of the enemy in many literary works, changed from being something evil to being 'other' human beings with faces and names. This search for the other's story still continues, over half a century later, as seen in the works by Hazzard's and Jones'. Such writers are trying to provide a broader evaluation of the effects of war, and understand Australia's role within an international context. The Pacific War should not only be remembered for the victims who fought against the enemy to protect their country, but also be remembered as a serious beginning of efforts to try and understand the 'other', when out of a negative encounter grew a positive experience.

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Notes

- 1 Kato, Megumi. *Narrating the Other: Australian Literary Perceptions of Japan*, Monash University Press, 2008.
- 2 On the representations of Japanese in Darwin and Broome, please see my "Darwin and Representations of the Japanese 'Other' in Australian Writing", *Bulletin of Meisei University*, Department of Japanese and Comparative Culture, School of Japanese Culture, no. 16, 2008, pp. 17-25; "Australia Bungaku ni Miru Nihonjin Byosha to Taiheiyō Senso: Broome no Baai" (The Pacific War and the Representations of the Japanese People in Broome, in Japanese), *The Southern Hemisphere Review*, v. 23, 2007, pp. 58-70.
- 3 Praed, Rosa. *Madame Izàn: A Tourist Story*. New York: D. Appleton, 1899. Diasporic writers from Australia in Japan (with such help as of Asialink) continue to depict the 'other' as well as themselves: recent examples include Caroline Shaw and Paddy O'Reilly.
- 4 Examples of such authors include Arthur Adams, Randolph Bedford and C. H. Kirmess.
- 5 Hungerford, T.A.G. *The Ridge and the River*, Sydney: Pacific Books, 1968; reprinted in 1971, pp. 92-4. The similar image of swimmers naked in the river in a brief moment between combats is visually shown in "Nimadao River, New Guinea" photoed by Max Dupain in 1943.
- 6 Braddon, Russell. "Song of War" in *End of a Hate*, 1958; London: Pan Books Ltd., 1960.
- 7 Clarke, Hugh. *Escape to Death: The Japanese Breakout at Cowra*, Milsons Point, N.S.W.: Random House Aus-

- tralia. 1994. This is the revised version of *Break-Out!*, Sydney: Horwitz, 1965.
- 8 Mackenzie, Kenneth Seaforth. *Dead Men Rising*, first published in London, 1951; in Australia in 1969; Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1975.
 - 9 Clarke, Hugh. *Break-Out!* Sydney: Horwitz, 1965. Revised and updated as *Escape to Death: the Japanese Breakout at Cowra*. Milsons Point, N.S.W.: Random House Australia, 1994. Gordon, Harry, *Die Like the Carp!: The Story of the Greatest Prison Escape Ever*. Stanmore, N.S.W.: Cassell Australia, 1978. Published in expanded and updated version as *Voyage from Shame: The Cowra Breakout and Afterwards*. St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1994.
 - 10 "Broken Sun" directed by Brad Haynes, 2008. "Anohi Bokura no Inochi ha Toilet Paper yori Karukatta" (On that day our life was lighter than toilet paper) aired by Nippon Television Broadcasting Corporation on 8 July 2008.
 - 11 Lambert, Eric. *MacDougal's Farm*, London: Frederick Muller, p. 63.
 - 12 *The Tub*, 1961, *Last Stop Nagasaki!* 1984, and *Twilight Liberation*, 1985.
 - 13 *The Brave Japanese*, Adelaide: Rigby, 1966; also published as *Road to Hiroshima*, Adelaide: Rigby, 1983.
 - 14 Hugerford, T.A.G. *Sowers of the Wind: A Novel of the Occupation of Japan*, Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1954. Porter, Hal. *A Handful of Pennies*. Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1958.
 - 15 Carroll, Steven. *Momoko*, Ringwood: McPhee Gribble, 1994.
 - 16 On Japanese War Bride please see my "Senso to Hanayome tachi: Dai Niji Sekai Taisen and Nichi-Go Kankei 1" (War and Brides: World War II and Japan-Australia Relationship, in Japanese) in *The Southern Hemisphere Review* v. 18, 2002, pp. 72-79.
 - 17 Hazzard, Shirley. *The Great Fire*, Great Britain: Virago Press, 2003. Jones, Gail. *Dreams of Speaking*, Sydney: Random House Australia, 2006.
 - 18 One of few earlier examples is Roger Pulvers, whose frequent stay in Japan over many years after 1967 enabled him to produce novels and plays on the Pacific War and its aftermath seen from both sides. They include: *The Death of Urashima Taro*, Angus and Robertson, 1981 (Japanese translation: *Urashima Taro no Shi*, Tokyo: Shinchosha, 1981); *Yamashita*, Sydney: Currency Press, 1981; *General Yamashita's Treasure*, Angus and Robertson, 1994 (Originally named *Three Goals to Nhill*, Japanese translation: Tokyo: Chikuma Shobo, 1986).
 - 19 Happell, Charles. *The Bone Man of Kokoda*, Sydney: Pan Macmillan Australia, 2008.
 - 20 From "Address at Battle for Australia Commemorative Ceremony", Australia War Memorial, Canberra, 3 September 2008 found at http://www.pm.gov.au/media/Speech/2008/speech_0454.cfm on 6 October 2008.
 - 21 Stalney, Peter. *Invading Australia*, Victoria: Penguin Group Australia, 2008.
 - 22 Peter Stanley and Bob Wurth in "Battle Lines", *The Weekend Australian*, Review, August 30-31, 2008.