Chapter One

Reading Whitlam and Whitlamism: The Role of Ideology

In this thesis I am primarily concerned with identifying and clarifying the specific cultural origins of Whitlamite social democracy and Australian neo-classical liberalism. In order to demonstrate the need for and value of this project, however, it must be established that there is a genuine ideological deadlock over historical interpretations of what has been termed ‘the Whitlam period’: that interpretations of this period are shaped in fundamental ways by power. That is what I attempt to do in this chapter. Once the role of power in shaping historical interpretation and popular perception is made clear, the primary need for an examination of the origins of that power becomes apparent.

As set out in the introduction, it is generally accepted that the hopes that had been dominant within Australian society between 1966 and 1975 came to an end through four main developments: the dismissal of Whitlam; the defeat of the Whitlam-led ALP at the federal elections of 13 December; the arrival of a new, neo-classical liberal public-policy framework, via Treasury, Malcolm Fraser and the Liberal Party, based on a pessimistic view of human nature, social reality and the prospects for social planning, democratic or otherwise; and through a deterioration of global economic conditions. However, there is no agreement as to why these events and developments occurred. In this chapter it is argued that ideology played a central role in the coming to an end of this period of hope. Legal and economic factors were secondary to political factors at each level of this dramatic change in the nature of Australian society. Moreover, ideology also clearly continues to influence perceptions of this period. Intellectuals tend to interpret the fate of this government and its policies in terms of their understanding of whether or not the adoption of a neo-classical liberal public policy framework was historically inevitable. Also, within the most politically powerful institutions of the public sphere – the mass media – a conservative, neo-classical liberal interpretation of the Whitlam period dominates. Because it stands as contemporary Australia’s prime historical Other, arguments over this earlier period remain especially frequent and heated, and a clear
picture of the internal dynamics and external forces impacting upon this earlier Australian society remains especially difficult to obtain.

**Ideology and the Law: The Dismissal**

In *Matters for Judgement*, the book he wrote in order to place his side of the story of the Dismissal on the public record, Sir John Kerr argued that as Governor-General his role was that of a neutral arbiter between the government and opposition.⁴ The decision to dismiss the Whitlam government, he argues, was forced upon him by the fact that the government was unable to obtain supply – money – and was refusing to call a general election to resolve the deadlock.⁵ The decision to appoint a caretaker government, that of Malcolm Fraser’s Liberal-Country Party Coalition, was in Kerr’s view legitimate because Fraser had agreed to ensure that supply would then be granted and a general election immediately called. In the immediate term government could go on (because supply was ensured) and in the short term the people could be given an opportunity to resolve the issue at an election. In Kerr’s summary:

> The Senate, where the Government did not have a majority, in October 1975 denied supply to the Government ... The Prime Minister, instead of yielding as he had done eighteen months previously when denial of supply had been threatened, embarked on a course of attempting to govern without supply, whereas it is the responsibility of the Government to obtain supply in order to provide for the ordinary annual services of government and to meet its other commitments. If it cannot, it must let the people decide at an election what is to happen.

“Failing a compromise”, he continues, “or retreat by one side or the other, it was only by my having recourse to the reserve powers of the Crown that the situation could be resolved and the whole issue placed in the hands of the electorate for decision”.⁶ Kerr also states that he was concerned by the fact that in the face of the Opposition’s refusal to grant supply the Whitlam government was considering obtaining funds through non-traditional channels, such as with loans from Australia’s private banks.⁷ Throughout his book, Kerr portrays his own actions as having been driven by his felt primary duty to ‘the people’.

He emphasises that he was following the law and contends that his actions were politically neutral, that his chosen course was the rational one and that the overall
outcomes, in the face of Whitlam’s intransigence, were inevitable. Whitlam is depicted as irrational, emotional and arrogant, and the crowds of people who protested against Kerr’s actions are seen as extremist violent thugs.

Kerr’s actions, then, are based on an assumption that it is legally more important for a government to be able to obtain finance than for that government to be democratically elected. As he writes: “Mr Fraser, while strongly defending the constitutionality of what had been done [i.e. the Dismissal], refused to be diverted during the [1975 federal election] campaign from economic issues”. The implicit suggestion here is that the economic issues were more important than legal ones. But there is no precedent for this ostensibly legal decision; it is an entirely arbitrary one. There is also obviously no way that Kerr could have known whether or not one of the sides of politics would have backed down during this deadlock by the time supply ran out on 30 November. If only one non-government Senator had decided to ‘cross the floor’ and vote with the government in order that the government could obtain funds to govern – a not unlikely prospect – then the constitutional crisis would have been democratically resolved.

Moreover, it could be argued that the proper role of the Governor-General within the Australian political system is not the role of the Crown’sarbiter between the Government and Opposition – not the role of the Queen’s umpire in an Australian political football match – but rather to be the servant of the Government and Prime Minister, the party and the leader who have obtained power through obtaining a majority in the most democratic of the Australian Houses of Parliament: the House of Representatives. This had in fact been the established procedure at the federal level prior to the Governor-Generalship of Kerr, and it was widely assumed that as Australia was an independent nation the Crown’s representative no longer had power to act against the Australian government on the Crown’s authority. Kerr derides this interpretation of the role of the Governor-General as the “rubber-stamp theory”, sounding incredulous that anyone could suggest such a minor political role for himself: “A focal question: Is the Governor-General, under the Constitution, a robot, a rubber stamp, a cipher? ... Did Mr Whitlam have such a concept of the office in mind when he nominated me for it? Did he aspire to reduce the office to such a level?” “The rubber-stamp theory” complains
Kerr, “negates the existence of the reserve powers, of all vice-regal personal
discretion”.13 But why there should be vice-regal discretion in a democracy is not made
clear; another name for the ‘rubber-stamp’ theory could be ‘the democratic theory’, since
the government and the Prime Minister are elected and the Governor-General is not.
Plainly the Dismissal was legal because Australia was not in fact a sovereign nation, with
complete control over its own affairs, though Kerr denies this. Rather, Kerr’s unilateral
act becomes profoundly democratic, because although the Governor-General attains his
or her authority from the Crown, in a tortured use of logic he or she supposedly acts in
the interests of the people.14 For Kerr, the British monarch and the Australian people are
essentially one. This medieval notion is in the contemporary world as illogical as it is
unconvincing.15

Though Kerr appointed Fraser and his Liberal-Country Party Coalition as a
caretaker government on the proviso that Fraser could obtain supply and would
immediately call a federal election, there was no reason why Fraser and his political
colleagues need necessarily carry out their side of this ‘gentleman’s agreement’. Fraser
could upon appointment have requested Queen Elizabeth II to recall her representative in
Australia, appointed a new, politically quiescent Governor-General, and proceeded to
attempt to govern with a minority in the House of Representatives. This minority after all
did not impede the Coalition government between 11 November and 13 December 1975,
in spite of the fact that on 11 November the ALP used its numbers to pass a motion of no
confidence in the government.16 As Kerr knew, it was extremely unlikely that Fraser
would choose to take this option, but it was unlikely because this would be against
Fraser’s obvious political interests rather than because it was legally or constitutionally
impossible. Similarly, while Kerr argues that the alternative sources of finance the
Whitlam government was interested in obtaining may have been illegal, he did not wait
for a legal decision on the matter but took action on the basis of his subjective views
about which sources of finance were best.

When the Whitlam government was hampered by an obstructionist Senate in its
first term Whitlam had gone back to the electorate seeking a mandate at the elections of
18 May 1974. But at that election Whitlam had been unable to obtain a majority in the
Senate. With the worsening economic conditions and a more strident attack on the

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government coming from the mass media, it was unlikely that if Whitlam had called another general election in November 1975 his government would have been able to attain a majority in the Senate. This would have meant that the Liberal-Country Party Coalition could easily have gone on rejecting Labor legislation and again refused to grant supply. Government would in practical terms become, as it had to a significant degree already, impossible. A perception of governmental incompetence could be created and, especially via a hostile mass media, propagandised. The fact that Whitlam had gone back to the polls once already within his short period of government should have lent weight to his claim that his government had a right to serve out its full term. Kerr’s simplistic assertion that his use of the reserve powers would bring about a democratic resolution to the political and constitutional crisis is therefore either facetious or ignorant.

Finally, in choosing to dismiss the Whitlam government Kerr did not intervene in a politically neutral way. Rather, his actions contributed to public perceptions that the Whitlam government was either incompetent or corrupt. As Donald Horne argues persuasively, Kerr intervened to advance the interests of one side of politics at the expense of the other:

What happened? This: The Governor-General secretly made a decision, the effect of which was to support the political plans of the Liberal and National Country Parties. Against all contemporary practice he did not discuss that decision with the government that was then in power. But having contemplated the decision secretly he secretly got for it the support of the Chief Justice, a person of no more constitutional significance in this matter than you or me, but one whose respected office could seem to give extra authority to what the Governor-General had decided. The Governor-General then mounted a time-tabled operation, for which the phrase ‘constitutional coup d’état’ seems a useful description. It was an operation which had the general effect of leaving the Prime Minister with a false sense of security, then, without discussing any alternatives, kicking him out of office, installing the minority leader as Prime Minister, then dissolving Parliament. It all happened so quickly that no preventive action could be taken.17

“Never before”, Horne concludes, “has an Australian Governor-General intervened in a way that so much favoured one party and so threatened another”.18 And he makes the vital point that “by the second half of 1975, the Labor government was adjusting itself to these new circumstances” of global economic crisis: “A few months free of political
crisis and Labor’s economic ministers might have been seen by a significant margin of voters as economic managers who were sounder (as well as more humane) than the Opposition was likely to be. For the Liberals, it was vital that Labor should not have time to do this”. 19 Coincidentally or otherwise, the side of politics that Kerr acted to advance was the side which traditionally accepted and embraced Australia’s political subservience to the Crown, Kerr’s source of power. How, after all, can a representative of the Crown ultimately be politically neutral, as Kerr claimed himself to be?

It seems that personal factors also played a part in Kerr’s decisions and actions. He obviously felt slighted or insufficiently respected by Whitlam and there is an evident desire on Kerr’s part to assert himself personally against Whitlam. He bridles at what he feels to be Whitlam’s attempt to reduce him to a “robot, a rubber stamp, a cipher” and at Whitlam’s apparent contempt for his office: “Did he”, Kerr asks, “aspire to reduce the office to such a level?” Responding to having been called ‘Judas’ by post-11 November protestors, Kerr retorts: “Judas, as most people must surely know, was the disciple who betrayed Christ for thirty pieces of silver. Where is the Messiah whose disciple I am supposed to have been? To whom or to what cause can it be claimed I was a traitor? Can anyone seriously claim that I was or should have been Mr Whitlam’s disciple”. 20 According to Elizabeth Reid, Whitlam’s advisor on women’s issues, Kerr tried to woo her romantically prior to dismissing Whitlam, with the claim that he, rather than Whitlam, was the most powerful man in Australia, and even boasted to her about his Dismissal plans. 21

Linked to this personal difference between Kerr and Whitlam is an important political difference. It seems likely that Whitlam did not respect the office of Governor-General to the degree that Kerr thought proper because this was not at all a democratic office and Whitlam was most fundamentally a democrat. For Kerr, on the other hand, royal power properly remained an important source of power within Australian society. As he writes: “Basic to my position was that I am a convinced constitutional monarchist, as the Monarchy exists under the Constitution in Australia”. 22 Kerr sees his actions in heroic terms; he was fighting courageously against the mob to restore law and some kind of natural social order. He writes of being subjected to a “two-pronged assault” by “violence and by vilification”, after the Dismissal, part of “a defined strategy, the object
of which was to make it impossible for me to stay in office. The intention was either to make me a prisoner in [his official residence of] Yarralumla or to break my spirit so that I could not carry on. My counter-strategy was to accept every invitation I could. I would never have resigned in the face of aggression”.

The run-of-the-mill ‘violence’ of protestors, throwing paint at Kerr’s car, for instance, is seized upon by him as a sign of his own supposed heroism. Upon his decision in 1977 to resign his position as Governor-General, he writes with similar melodrama: “Certainly no one could credibly claim that I had gone defeated under attack”. There is the sense of a reward being obtained in his proud recollection: “Shortly after the [1975] election my wife and I left for London so that I could personally report to the Queen. During the visit we had the privilege of spending a snowy January weekend as guests of Her Majesty at Sandringham”. Later, without any real context, he launches into an account of the royal and quasi-royal honours bestowed upon him in 1977 after his part in the constitutional coup:

I was sworn in as a member of Her Majesty’s Privy Council at a meeting presided over by the Queen at Yarralumla. During an audience on board the Britannia in Fremantle harbour Her Majesty invested me as a Knight Grand Cross of the Royal Victorian Order. (I had previously, in 1975 when the Queen established the Order of Australia of which she is Sovereign, become the first Chancellor and a Companion of the Order and later, when the rank of knighthood was introduced, the first Knight of the Order of Australia. In 1976 Her Majesty had promoted me to the rank of Knight Grand Cross in the Order of St Michael and St George. Throughout my Governor-Generalship I was Prior in Australia and a Knight of the Order of St John of Jerusalem and in April 1977 was awarded the Grand Cross of Merit of the Sovereign and Military Order of Malta, the Catholic Order which exists in brotherly relationship with The Order of St John).

The point appears to be to suggest to his readers the high esteem he is held in by the most important of people. Clearly, Kerr did not see himself as Whitlam’s underling because he did not see the monarchy as democracy’s underling.

**Ideology and Democracy**

It may seem unnecessary to argue that political ideology played a part in the 13 December 1975 federal election results. However, it does need to be stressed that the
political process within this election campaign was manipulated by power to a degree that was and remains unprecedented in Australian history, partly because political conservatives from Kerr onwards have pointed to this federal election landslide as evidence of the Australian electorate’s purportedly fundamental antipathy toward Whitlam, Whitlamism and the welfare-state model of public policy and government, of which the Whitlam government was the last Australian representative. Within this popular narrative – enunciated for example by Paul Kelly – the end of Whitlamism and the new dominance of a neo-classical liberal public policy framework reflect an essentially rational and democratic public and governmental response to a new set of social conditions.  

However, although it was constitutionally entitled to serve out its full term of government and had obtained a renewed mandate once already within its relatively brief period of office (in May 1974), Whitlam’s government was not given the opportunity of choosing the timing for its next election campaign. In spite of the difficult economic conditions it had faced and the numerous political ‘scandals’ it had suffered, opinion polls clearly demonstrated that in late 1975, prior to its dismissal, the Whitlam government was regaining electoral support. Then Labor was forced to run its campaign in the shadow of having been dismissed. As Donald Horne notes, “after the constitutional coup d’etat the quick plebiscitary election was conducted in unparalleled circumstances in which Labor could seem a guilty party dismissed by rightful authority”. With the exception of the ABC, the owners and senior managers of the mass media aligned themselves with the conservatives, meaning that the new Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser was not questioned in any thorough-going way, while an ongoing, vehement attack on Whitlam, his government and his party, continued. The mass-media assault was led by a feral Murdoch press, with Murdoch personally initiating and enforcing a blanket editorial opposition to Whitlam and Labor. Such was the interference by Murdoch in his staff’s reporting of politics that News Ltd printers and journalists were moved to go on strike. This strike, as Bridget Griffen-Foley notes, “was the first stoppage in Australian journalistic history over the handling of politics in a particular media outlet”. Though the news media had in the years leading up to these events enjoyed a relatively high degree of respect and admiration within society,
Windschuttle argued in 1988 that the press generally had yet to recover its public credibility after its 1975 treatment of the Whitlam-led ALP.35

In November 1974 Kerr made known to Murdoch his belief that he had the power to dismiss the elected government, perhaps to encourage Murdoch – via his newspaper editors – to call for this unprecedented action and so provide a veneer of ‘public’ demand and legal legitimacy for it.36 The Labor election campaign, based on an assertion that the Dismissal constituted a profound threat to Australian democracy and could not be allowed to stand as the basis for a government, was not given substantial consideration within the mass media. Reasoned and critical debate as a whole took a backseat in the election campaign, to a degree that was at the time unprecedented. Corporate donations to the conservatives and corporate-funded advertising and public relations ‘spin’ also reached a new high and a new level of sophistication.37 The general media attack on the Labor government and the Labor side of politics was not a reflection of any popular renunciation of Labor (as can be seen from the increasing popularity of the Whitlam government prior to the Dismissal in late 1975), but rather a reflection of the fact that an increasing number of the most powerful people within Australia were angered by the policies of Whitlam and believed that this government could no longer be tolerated. As R.W. Connell wrote on the day of the Dismissal:

> If there remained any lingering doubt about the class nature of Australian politics, the events of late 1975 must have resolved it. There is hardly a clearer case, in the recent history of the ‘western democracies’, of the way a threatened ruling class is able to mobilise fragments of state power, business connections, financial resources, and the legitimacy given them by the dominant culture, in a campaign to remove an offending government.38

In his comprehensive, detailed and sophisticated account of this ‘mobilisation’, Connell demonstrates how the class-based structure and nature of Australian society worked against the capacity of the Whitlam government – and by implication, any government – to advance politically progressive policy via the existing democratic process.39 That is, the Whitlam government’s interest in using the democratic process to initiate progressive social change brought it into direct conflict with the interests of the most powerful groups in society. By the end of 1973 for example, some businessmen
were complaining about no longer having the degree of special access to government that they had enjoyed in the past: “The president of the Associated Stock Exchanges ... complained in October 1973 that he had not seen a minister for three weeks!”

The mining sector was publicly hostile to the obvious interest of Rex Connor, Minister for Minerals and Energy, in establishing a major Australian-government owned mining company, “buying and distributing fuels, undertaking exploration and presumably production in its own right”. “Mining executives traded insults with the government, and continued to abuse it through 1975”, Connell records; and he adds: “This sentiment no doubt was part of the reason behind the huge outcry over the government’s overseas loan fiasco in 1975, involving money that seems to have been intended to finance Connor’s projects”. The farming sector reacted against Whitlam’s stress on urban issues: “It was not long before conservative politicians were stumping the countryside about the government’s war on farmers, to some effect: they took three country seats from Labor in the 1974 election, tipping Grassby, one of the government’s most popular figures, out of his Riverina seat”. The year 1973 saw a revival of extreme right and doctrinaire free-enterprise rhetoric: “‘Creeping socialism’, ‘centralism’ (a term carried over from the days of Gorton, now much favoured by conservative state premiers) and government ‘interference’ with business were now often heard of”. These complaints, Connell goes on to note,

were even seen, as cartoon images of the government as a snooping bureaucrat began to pepper the propaganda of business and professional groups. The Australian Medical Association and the General Practitioners’ Society in their struggle with Hayden over medical insurance gave good play to these ideas, as did the Bank of NSW in its attack on the AIDC proposals in early 1974, and the insurance companies in 1975. Most important, they were picked up by [then Liberal leader] Snedden, who very probably interpreted this rhetoric as a sign of a new business mobilisation, and certainly took a more doctrinaire position than the Liberal leadership had done since the early 1950s.

Connell points out further that this “ideological offensive ... launched by some sections of business” came mostly from:

- groups of business ideologues organised in ‘non-political’ associations, like the Institute of Public Affairs in NSW (somewhat less militantly from the separate IPA in Victoria), and the NSW Constitutional League; and
(from) peak associations such as the Melbourne Chamber of Commerce and the Associated Chambers of Commerce. There was also a vigorous fundamentalist response from businessmen like (John) Singleton ... and the iron magnate (Lang) Hancock. 46

Between 1973 and 1975 there was “the growth of a cadre of business ‘spokesmen’ and a wider use of public relations techniques both by individual companies and by industry groups: miners, advertising, and employer organisations as a whole”. 47 This was in response to the fact that, “as a CRA executive put it in 1974 ... the public image of big business was low”. 48

At a more fundamental level, Connell explains, Kerr’s dismissal “itself was made possible by another instance of ruling-class opposition to the government. For it was the refusal of the private banks to accept a temporary finance arrangement that finally broke its delaying strategy and gave Kerr occasion to dismiss it”. 49 Moreover, “the stock market, a sensitive if oblique indicator of the state of mind of capitalists, jumped 17 points on the day Whitlam was dismissed, and had previously twitched upwards at every rumour of trouble in the government”. 50 Part of Connell’s argument is that within capitalist society, the capitalist class generally has structural political advantages over other classes, and that this structural power was used to dislodge the Whitlam government. 51

Idea and Economic Policy: Fraser’s Liberals and Neo-classical Liberalism

“Like many of his generation”, Bolton writes, “Whitlam had been inspired when young by the example of Franklin Roosevelt and the American New Deal, and this was a model for which Australia seemed ready in 1972”. 52 As David Kemp suggests, Whitlam’s social-democratic government was in many ways a logical outcome of a public-policy framework based on the thought of John Maynard Keynes. 53 That is, once President Roosevelt implemented the Keynesian ‘New Deal’, as a response to the 1930s Depression and the threat of communism, 54 accepting and widely propagating the view that government had the capability, the right and the responsibility to ensure full employment, it was inevitable that the demands on government to ensure greater levels of social equality, by curbing the individualistic behaviour of individuals (especially those
powerful individuals whose behaviour tended to have social effects), would increase. For this reason, Kemp contends, it was during the Whitlam government that the tensions within Australian liberalism came to the fore, and the Keynesian, interventionist liberalism of Snedden, McMahon, Gorton, Holt, and Menzies was displaced by the neoclassical liberalism of Malcolm Fraser.\footnote{55}

Kemp states that \textit{The Road to Serfdom} (1944), by Friedrich Hayek, was along with Keynes’ \textit{General Theory} (1936) a key text for Australian liberal thought and debate in the postwar period.\footnote{56} It was from this and other books of Hayek and philosophically aligned economists, philosophers and commentators – especially Milton Friedman, who visited Australia on a highly publicised speaking tour in 1975 – that the Australian radical liberals developed a philosophical foundation for the destruction of Whitlamite social democracy and Keynesian public policy.\footnote{57} The Whitlam government was the last, in the Australian context, to be guided by the principles of social-democratic Keynesianism.\footnote{58}

The foundation of Keynes’s economic theory was his observation and demonstration that at the macro level the modern economy did not function in the way that it was supposed to according to classical economics.\footnote{59} More specifically, Keynes argued that at the macro level markets do not naturally tend towards a state of equilibrium, as the classical model of perfect competition asserts.\footnote{60} He therefore saw government as having a necessary role to play in correcting chronic market failure and ensuring the proper functioning of the economy. The implication of this finding was that the creation of private profit should ultimately be subservient to social goals and the democratic process. For Keynes, the economy and society were closely dependent upon each other. Accordingly, the primary policy goal of Keynesian economics was the creation of ‘positive freedom’, which, put another way, is the overcoming of structural disadvantage – inequality – arising from market failure. Whitlam’s economic and social policy was broadly based on Keynesian thought, as his own account attests: “I strove to relate the principal elements of the (policy) program to what I have called the doctrine of positive equality”.\footnote{61} Whitlam’s whole approach to policy, as he goes on to relate, is based on this Keynesian world view:

increasingly, a citizen’s real standard of living, the health of himself [sic, throughout] and his family, his children’s opportunity for education and self-improvement, his access to employment opportunities, his ability to
enjoy the nation’s resources for recreation and cultural activity, his legacy from the national heritage, his scope to participate in the decisions and actions of the community, are determined not so much by his income but by the availability and accessibility of the services which the community alone can provide and ensure. The quality of life depends less and less on the things which individuals obtain for themselves and can purchase for themselves from their personal incomes and depends more and more on the things which the community provides for all its members from the combined resources of the community.  

The policy approach of Keynes and Whitlam had its origins in the European Enlightenment, and the Enlightenment belief that it is possible to know the world and take rational steps to improve it for the benefit of all. The right-wing liberal thinkers who rejected Keynesian analysis and philosophy, however, drew upon pre-Enlightenment and pre-democratic strands of thought, arguing that it is not possible for government or other groups of people to change society for the benefit of everyone. As Richard Cockett notes, Hayek, Friedman and other germinal thinkers of what became known as the New Right, gathered as early as 1938, in Paris, “to mourn the end of liberal, even civilised, society as they understood it”. “Keynes”, Cockett writes, “had done more than any other single individual” to bring them there. These neo-classical liberal thinkers never accepted the legitimacy of government intervention in and control of the economy and from the 1930s set out to find evidence that the economy does function at the macro level in essentially the same way that it does at the micro level – in general accordance with the model of perfect competition – and so to destroy the theoretical basis for government intervention in the economy. The neo-classical liberals wished to overturn the assumption that the pursuit of private property should ultimately be subservient to any democratic process, and they argued that market ‘failure’ was in fact nothing more than the product of government intervention. Neo-classical liberal policy is built around the goal of destroying positive freedom – seen as an inherently unjust and subtly but powerfully enslaving concept arising from unwarranted government interference – and institutionalising ‘negative freedom’: freedom from government intervention.  

Though the Fraser government did not introduce the New Right public policy agenda to the extent that many on the far right would have liked – this dubious honour being left to Hawke, Keating and Howard – the Fraser government platform was strongly
based on this philosophy in the elections of 1975. While many have argued that the primary attraction of Friedman’s monetarism and neo-classical liberal public policy, to political leaders, was the promise of a cure for the high inflation afflicting the world economy between the early 1970s and early 1980s, Michael Pusey notes that neo-classical liberal public policy was originally “packaged” as a political response to new problems of social management: “In the mid 1970s ... elite opinion in the developed Western nations came to the judgement that these nations were drifting dangerously into ‘ungovernability’”. He explains:

Corporate sector profits and the profit share of national income had been falling steadily from the end of World War Two to the late 1970s ... and Keynesian economic policies were producing too many perverse effects. The view from the top was that the great postwar boom was threatening the very stability of democratic governance by generating too much contestation, and too many ‘irresponsible demands’ for higher wages and living standards and for more consumption and more publicly provided services.

In response to these problems, Pusey writes, came the New Right:

In 1975 libertarian and neo-conservative politics were first packaged as a political program for the reform of whole nation societies in The Crisis of Democracy: A Report on the Governability of Democracies to the Trilateral Commission. The diagnosis was clear: ‘an excess of democracy means a deficit in governability’. The ‘ungovernability of societies is a cultural failure’. Democracy is failing because governments are weighed down with an ‘overload’ of contradictory and ‘irresponsible’ demands. These were ‘the disruptive effects of continuous growth’ and of the excessive and ‘incompatible’ claims of citizens. The cure? Less, and more austere, government. And much more stern discipline from the markets.

This “new policy dispensation”, Pusey continues, “had clear priorities”:

Strong political leaders must take charge of public policy and bring bureaucracy to heel. They must bring the critical media into line and under corporate control. The trade unions and organised labour would be exposed to market discipline. Public debate must be managed more effectively, from the top down. The restructuring of higher education would need to mortify the ‘disruptive value intellectuals’ and give more scope to ‘action’ education, promoted as a business and for business. Various, by recommendation and implication, the new leaders must impose fiscal discipline, slash government spending, eliminate budget deficits and widen the reach of corporations in every area of society.
Pusey argues then that rather than being a response to economic crisis, neo-classical liberal public policy is a response to relative economic abundance; and to the resultant breakdown of the work ethic and traditional lines of social authority within the postwar welfare-state long boom. As Greg Whitwell has noted: “The 1970s saw the dissolution of a whole host of what were thought to be ‘usual’ or ‘traditional’ relationships”.

The perception, widespread among both defenders and critics of neo-classical liberal public policy, that the Keynesian public policy framework of the Whitlam government could not explain or provide a remedy for stagflation, is incorrect. Tim Battin argues convincingly, for example, that although the great majority of political leaders and bureaucrats within western democracies during the period of the Keynesian public-policy consensus did believe that inflation and unemployment existed in an inverse relationship, the piece of analysis upon which this assumption wrested – namely the ‘Phillips curve’ of A.W. Phillips – was not developed by Keynes and was not in any proper sense ‘Keynesian’. In any case, economists influenced by Keynes quickly added analyses of how cost- as well as price-levels could induce inflation and made allowance for the impact of policy ‘lags’, pointed out by monetarists and neo-classical liberals, thereby effectively negating the monetarist and neo-classical liberal critique of Keynesianism. As the chief architect of Australia’s postwar reconstruction, H.C. Coombs, argued in his autobiography: “The modifications to the Keynesian model which have been necessary to incorporate the importance of money and to preserve its relevance have not invalidated it – there has been no need for a ‘paradigm shift’ of the kind which has become necessary in physics to comprehend contemporary observations”. Pusey contends too that it is possible that “the state apparatus can develop the intellectual capacity to read, accept and reconcile the complexity of demands that are inherent in the reproduction of society”. The attempt by the Whitlam government to introduce legislation enabling it to control prices and incomes demonstrated some awareness of this and a continuing commitment to the basic principles of Keynesian public policy.
Ideology and Economic Crises

It is undoubtedly the case that the global economy did enter a period of great difficulty and uncertainty in 1973 – stagflation, in particular, was unprecedented – and that Australian political leaders, like others around the world, had to respond to these new and somewhat frightening economic conditions. Although parts of the world economy have since 1973 experienced high and even very high levels of growth, at times for protracted periods, there has not been a global pattern of strong, stable and socially equitable economic growth, comparable to that which occurred in the postwar ‘long boom’. And as there is no consensus on why the Anglo-American nations, in particular, embraced neo-classical liberal public policy in the wake of the 1973 crisis, there is also no consensus as to why this crisis, and the subsequent, long-term phenomena of slowed world growth and increased economic inequality and insecurity, within and between nations, occurred.

For scholars influenced by monetarism and neo-classical liberalism the primary reason for stagflation lay with Keynesian public policy, which placed undue restrictions on the individual and the market and inevitably, in the long run, both stifled growth and created unsustainable inflationary pressures. Such thinkers do not see the relative inequality and insecurity of the present as a problem, though they do argue that growth rates would be higher if government interference in and other restrictions on market forces were removed. Some scholars influenced by Keynes agreed with the neo-classical liberals that the problems of 1973 arose from the fact that governments had become too involved in the economy. While rejecting the monetarist and neo-classical liberal dictum that government should seek to wholly remove itself from the economy and society, these scholars accepted some of the limitations identified with economic planning – especially the problem of ‘lags’ – as well as the need for greater micro-economic reform, for more market ‘discipline’. Other scholars influenced by Keynes argued that the 1973 implosion resulted from the fact that governments had failed to put in place the more comprehensive forms of planning that Keynes had thought necessary, and pointed to social and political (including military) factors impacting upon the economic realm. Marxists and others emphasising the historical importance of class relations and struggle have seen the shift to neo-classical liberal public policy as either a manifestation of a new
phase of capitalist production (in which the importance of new forms of information
technology, enabling a new degree of mobility for capital and a shift from labour to
capital-intensive industry, is foregrounded)\textsuperscript{85} or as a new political basis for ostensibly
democratic social management.\textsuperscript{86} Other scholars argue that the period of postwar growth
came to an end because the public policy of this time was premised on an industrial
model of social advancement which had become environmentally unsustainable.\textsuperscript{87}

What can be said with confidence, however, is that the primary factor impacting
upon the final shape of the agreement on global economic (more specifically, demand)
management reached at the 1944 conference of the leaders of the US, Britain and their
allies, at Bretton Woods, New Hampshire, was the political desire of the US
administration to maintain its global economic and political supremacy. As Robbie
Robertson writes:

In 1944 at Bretton Woods (Keynes) argued that post-war recovery
depended on more than just postwar reconstruction. The new postwar
order, he said, had specifically ‘to develop the resources and production
capacity of ... less developed countries, to [raise] the standard of life and
the conditions of labour everywhere, [and] to make the resources of the
world more fully available to mankind everywhere’. But his advice went
unheeded, drowned out by the exigencies of Cold War [sic] and by
America’s determination to profit most from its new global strategies.\textsuperscript{88}

Michael Stewart explains further: “To Keynes, Britain’s chief negotiator at Bretton
Woods, it seemed essential that in the postwar era countries should not be forced by
temporary balance of payments difficulties to deflate their economies in an effort to
reduce their import bill: this would create unnecessary unemployment both at home and
abroad”.\textsuperscript{89} Rather, “they should ... possess or be able to borrow enough foreign exchange
to tide them over ... until things improved”.\textsuperscript{90} Accordingly, Keynes proposed the
establishment of what he called an ‘International Clearing Union’. This would create
credit in a world context in much the same way that a central bank creates credit in a
national context.\textsuperscript{91} This scheme was conceived on a major scale: total overdraft facilities
would amount to around $26 billion, equivalent to half the value of world imports in
1948.\textsuperscript{92}

The American negotiators could see some benefits to this policy approach:
ensuring a decent level of global demand would ensure a market for US exports,\textsuperscript{93} while
increased economic security and equality would minimise the attractiveness of political and economic overtures from the Soviet Union within the looming Cold War. But overall, according to Stewart, “the Americans did not like Keynes’ plan”. The personal accounts of Bretton Woods conference negotiators and observers bear this out. And Stewart reasons that the Americans “had some justification for their attitude”, in that America, as the world’s strongest economy, would have to foot most of the bills. Consequently, the Americans insisted on establishing the International Monetary Fund (IMF) rather than the International Clearing Union. The Fund did not create credit. Rather, it received subscriptions from its members in proportion to the size of their economy, and gave them in return quotas equivalent to their subscriptions: the advantage for the member nations was that seventy-five per cent of a subscription could be paid in national currency, while a quota could be obtained in US dollars. The total size of the quotas was only $9 billion, roughly a third of the figure Keynes had thought necessary. Moreover, the Americans insisted, against the arguments of Keynes, that the IMF have the right to make payments of quotas subject to certain conditions. Over time, especially, these conditions have overwhelmingly suited the short-term economic interests of US corporate creditors and the long-term political interests of the US political leaders, or ruling class. “It can certainly be argued”, Stewart notes, “that the resources available to the IMF were inadequate to start with, and have become more inadequate with the passage of time”.

It can also be said with confidence that the primary reason why US President Richard Nixon decided in 1971 to suspend the convertibility of the US dollar, thereby effectively beginning the end of the postwar international system of economic management, was a political one. Like President Johnson before him, Nixon wanted to increase the American war effort in Vietnam without taking the domestically unpopular decision to raise taxes. As Bolton makes clear: “These flourishing times came to an end partly because of the Vietnam War. Trying to finance the war without cutting back on welfare and economic growth, the Johnson and Nixon administrations in the United States launched a series of deficit budgets. These built up inflationary forces which released much speculative capital”. As French President Charles de Gaulle and later Gough Whitlam complained, the highly ‘loose’ monetary policy of the US government
led to an exporting of inflation throughout the world. As Robertson explains in more detail:

American deficits presented difficulties for countries that now found themselves with a surplus of dollars. Fearing that the resultant rise in money supply would increase inflation, European nations traded their Eurodollars and tried to convert reserves to gold. During the 1960s US gold reserves declined sufficiently to threaten dollar convertibility, and the United States found itself in a position similar to that of West European countries in the early 1950s. Like them, domestic pressures for social programs (and Cold War pressures for military expenditure) made the normal IMF prescription – expenditure reduction policies – politically impossible. By 1971 the international flight from the dollar forced President Richard Nixon to suspend the dollars’ convertability, devalue the dollar 7.5 per cent, and impose a temporary 10 per cent tax on all imports to pressure European currencies to revalue. In doing so he brought down two crucial pillars of the Bretton Woods system – convertability and stability.

“By 1973”, Stewart writes, “the world had reverted to a regime under which the major currencies were floating fairly freely against each other”.

If stagflation was most directly the result of the arrival of ‘cost-push’ inflation, caused by increased wage and other costs of production, then this also can be traced to the Vietnam war. “Wage demands”, writes Bolton, “were largely a response to the world-wide inflationary forces released by the Vietnam War and steadily undermining the American financial system as a bulwark of western capitalism”. The war in Vietnam served also to weaken the US – economically, politically and morally – in the Middle East. As Graham Freudenberg writes: “America’s preoccupation with Indo-China where her essential interests did not lie, led to a corresponding loss of influence in the Middle East, where the West’s vital interests do lie. In the Vietnam years, the Soviet Union established ascendency in the Arab world. When the Yom Kippur war broke out on 6 October 1973, American prestige and influence was at its nadir”. This contributed to the willingness and ability of the OPEC nations to act collectively to substantially cut production and so dramatically increase the cost of oil between December 1973 and January 1974.

The more direct trigger for this oil ‘shock’, however, was the US support for Israel in the October 1973 Arab-Israeli war, a decision strongly influenced by the US
commitment to Israel as a bulwark against Soviet political influence and economic power in the Middle East. This ‘oil shock’ is perhaps the single event most closely associated with the arrival of the global economic malaise of the mid-1970s, and along with two subsequent oil shocks between the late 1970s and early 1980s is crucial in the reshaping of global economic power, production levels and policy. For with this dramatic increase in the price of oil, a massive redistribution of global wealth – into the hands of the leaders of the OPEC nations and the owners and controllers of the oil companies – takes place. Partly because the OPEC nations did not have modern, industrialised economies, this wealth was in turn invested in private financial institutions, especially within the US and Western-European finance sector. Since IMF funds were so limited and came with strict and often economically counter-productive conditions, many poorer or ‘third world’ nations sought loans from these ‘first world’ banks at this time, especially to meet the increased costs of production and consumption brought about by the OPEC oil shocks. Rex Connor’s plan to borrow $2 billion to finance major infrastructural investment is developed in this context. During this time of economic downturn the burgeoning finance sector was only too eager to make these loans available, often with very generous initial repayment conditions, so that the sector would be able to meet its own interest payments, especially to the governments of the OPEC nations. By the time these repayments began to be due, following the final oil shock of the early 1980s, it was apparent that most debtor countries could not repay their principal sum, and many could not even meet the costs of interest payments. Around the world, massive and steadily increasing inequality between and within nations, and massive areas of economic stagnation, became the norm.

As Paul Kennedy suggests in his study of economic change and military conflict between 1500 and 2000, “wealth is usually needed to underpin military power, and military power is usually needed to acquire and protect wealth”. It seems that the US commitment to maintaining its geo-political power was the major factor in the finance sector coming to displace the industrial sector as the largest and most powerful sector of capital, at the global level, by the mid-1970s. Since the finance sector clearly stands to lose out in a context of broad-based industrial productivity accompanied by increasing economic equality and consumption (because its share of wealth would by definition
decrease), people who benefit primarily from this sector have from the mid-1970s had an economic and political interest in the preservation of a climate of low levels of industrial and productive investment and relative economic stagnation, inequality and insecurity: conditions broadly characteristic of the neo-classical liberal age. Where Connell writes in 1977: “The end of the Labor government is still too recent to offer a full analysis”, by 2002 he is able to argue that neo-classical liberal public policy is essentially an expression of the political power of the global finance sector:

Starting with the Eurodollar market of the 1960s, the world economy has seen a massive growth of mobile capital. Local capital markets have been amalgamated, using new communications technology, into an interacting global financial system. At some point in this process the quantitative increase in mobile funds became a qualitative shift in hegemony from industrial capital to finance capital. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that neo-liberalism has functioned as the ideology of this shift.

Keith Windschuttle had earlier emphasised the importance of members of the finance sector within the international New Right movement. The New Right, he says in 1988, is comprised of “politicians, academics, PR people and big business interests, especially the financial sector whose profits were threatened in the mid-1970s by the high rate of inflation and government regulations of interest rates”.

Though this growth of the finance sector is clearly a new development in this historical context, once the imperialist nature of American economic policy is recognised this growth should not come as a surprise. In his classic 1902 study of the relationship between the internal dynamics of capitalism and imperialism, J.A. Hobson emphasised how increasing economic inequality, such as that flowing on from the 1970s oil shocks, tends to lead to the accumulation of capital and the pressure to invest it abroad when the domestic market is saturated. The need to finance, manage and protect these investments leads to the growth of an oversized financial class and an increasingly powerful military establishment, with each of these factors being fuelled by the growing concentration of industry resulting from the absence of restrictions on market forces, such as those of the Bretton Woods system. As Wheelwright summarises Hobson’s quite amazingly prescient argument:

The apparatus of government becomes more centralised, the power of the executive grows, that of the legislature declines and there is a decay of
political party activity, especially that which is critical of imperial adventures. The nation is corrupted by the false values of its superiority and destiny, to develop a new world economic and political structure.\textsuperscript{120}

Hobson’s analysis was made of the UK, but even in 1902 he considered that the US was following in Britain’s footsteps.\textsuperscript{121}

It can be argued then that while new technology may lead to the loss of jobs in certain areas and to a new mobility of capital, it does not in itself necessitate either unemployment (there remains much useful work for people to do) or inequality (primarily a result of the specifically political injunction that an unregulated labour market is essentially rational),\textsuperscript{122} conditions often held in the post-Whitlam, post-Keynesian era, to be inevitable characteristics of modern or postmodern capitalism. By the same logic, while the full industrialisation of the global economy may not be ecologically sustainable, this does not mean that full employment and increasing equality are unsustainable in either the ‘first’ or the ‘third’ world. In any case, it can be seen that at each social level – the legal, the electoral (or formal political), the theoretical level (of policy) and even the economic – ideology or power played a central or constitutive role, and not an incidental role, in the coming to an end of Whitlamite and Keynesian hope.

\textbf{Ideology and History}

Contemporary interpretations of this period and the shift to neo-classical liberal public policy tend also to reflect the political struggle involved in this historical development. Ideology continues to play a fundamental role in the interpretation of both the Whitlam period and the reasons for its demise.

In terms of its own ideology, or world view, the Whitlam government is most often labelled, as it was by Whitlam, ‘social democratic’,\textsuperscript{123} though what constitutes a social democratic philosophy is not self-evident. Some historians of the ALP, such as Carol Johnson and Andrew Scott, refer to the Party under Whitlam’s leadership as a social democratic party, while applying the label loosely to all those parties purportedly representing labour rather than capital.\textsuperscript{124} But if we are to be able to distinguish between the dominant philosophies of a party leadership at different times, this blanket application of ‘social democrat’ will clearly not do. On the other hand, Boris Frankel argues that
Whitlam’s was never properly a social-democratic government, in the sense that it never articulated any attempt to move beyond capitalism. As Connell notes: “for all the ranting that was heard from the right about ‘Canberra socialism’, (the Whitlam government) had a most circumspect and modest program of reform”. Yet although it may not have spelt out a program for moving beyond capitalism or for transcending one or more of capitalism’s essential characteristics – private property, markets and individual material incentive – this government did take for granted the view that government planning, rather than market forces, constituted the best means of social organisation, and did not seal off the possibility that the private business sector might in time become unnecessary. In both of these senses the ideology of the ALP during the period of the Whitlam government is qualitatively different from that of the ALP under its subsequent leadership, and arguably from that of the ALP prior to Whitlam also. In Hugh Emy’s persuasive assessment: “Whitlamism marked a significant ideological turn in the development of the ALP: away from Labourism, from a tight identification with both the interests and rather conservative, insular outlook of organised labour; and towards a more open, ambitious and sophisticated style of social democracy”. For Race Mathews, Whitlam’s political philosophy and practice were centrally informed by the social democratic tradition of Fabianism:

No other Australian political leader has so comprehensively championed the core Fabian values of liberty, community, democracy, equality and the elimination of poverty. None have been so consistently Fabian in their use of objective public policy research and advocacy in the securing of informed public consent for gradualist parliamentary reform.

This social democratic philosophy of Whitlam’s ALP can also be distinguished from a ‘democratic liberal’ ideology, that articulates a necessary but properly limited role for government: an ideology consistent with more right-wing or conservative readings of Keynes (and, by and large, the view of Keynes himself).

Contemporary social democrats tend to be most forgiving of the Whitlam government’s faults and to interpret its role in this national journey from hope to disillusion in the least critical way. In the literature, Whitlam has been amongst the most active and effective exponents of the social democratic framework of his government. His major work on this subject remains the principal account of it: The Whitlam
In this book he writes: “By the time we came to government in December 1972, we had developed a program of reform fully capable of achievement within the Constitution ... The program was developed on the basis of a three-fold relevance – its constitutional relevance, its political relevance, and its actual relevance to the needs of modern Australia”. According to Whitlam, from the time of his election as leader of the ALP on 8 February 1967, he addressed himself to three principal tasks: “to develop a coherent program of relevant reform; to convince the Labor movement that the parliamentary institutions were relevant in achieving real reform; and to convince a majority of Australians that such reforms were relevant to themselves and to their country”. In the famous Blacktown Civic Centre speech of 13 November 1972, launching the ALP election campaign, “the work of the preceding six years”, Whitlam writes, “came together comprehensively”. In this speech Whitlam stated “Our Program has three great aims”, these being:

— to promote equality;
— to involve the people of Australia in the decision-making processes of our land;
— and to liberate the talents and uplift the horizons of the Australian people.

These can be seen respectively as Whitlam’s economic, political and cultural aims. “The rest of this book”, he states in his introduction, “is largely an account of our efforts to give substance to those ideals”.

Whitlam’s works are open to criticism in that they over-emphasise the rational and carefully planned basis, not only of policy, but of policy outcomes. Drew Cottle states of Whitlam’s history of his own government:

Without a hint of self-criticism, Whitlam, over several hundred pages of text, lists the achievements of his government. At the fateful hour in 1975, Sir John Kerr and Malcolm Fraser scuttle the Whitlam ship of state bound for Byzantium. And so the legend, like all Labor myths, persists. Everything could have been achieved, according to Whitlam, had not the blackguards Kerr and Fraser overthrown parliamentary traditions and the Australian Constitution.

The expressed views of the high-profile Bob Ellis are representative of the social democratic “Whitlam industry” Cottle complains about:
Gough Whitlam may not be the answer, but he is the question ... The good old days are dead, and we live now in an era that, in John Osborne’s phrase, might best be described as the Mean Time, an era that Whitlam haunts like a mocking Puck, a Robin Goodfellow darting from gum leaf to gum leaf with his wand and fairy dust and one-liners, tormenting us each midsummer night with how it might have been. A decent Swedish outcome. A golden age.¹³⁹

But Ellis, like other social democratic intellectuals, consciously emphasises the positive social outcomes of this era in order to contrast it in the public mind with what he sees as a manifestly unsatisfying present. His overblown language is consciously polemical. And if the analysis of Ellis seems to lack rigour, this is perhaps partly because he has consciously or otherwise refused to grant the primacy of scientistic economic language. Mathematics is useful but not, according to Ellis, the desirable basis of public policy.¹⁴⁰

Cottle’s criticism of social democratic mythologising is representative of the strand of socialist thought which rejects the contention that the Whitlam government was ever a meaningful force for progressive social change. This general argument was initially formulated upon Whitlam’s election by ‘New Left’ radicals,¹⁴¹ and has more recently been argued by Carol Johnson, among others.¹⁴² More common however among socialist intellectuals is the view that while the reforms of the Whitlam government were relatively minor and in no way constituted a threat to the capitalist foundations of society, this government did represent the Australian high-point of progressive parliamentary democracy and to this extent presided over a society closer to socialism than those which preceded and followed it. As Connell and Irving note in their landmark study of class structure in Australian history: “The Whitlam leadership represented much more than a change in federal parliament, as is shown by the emergence of similar leaderships in South Australia and eventually New South Wales and Victoria”.¹⁴³ For most intellectuals sympathetic toward socialism, particularly those to whom social democratic reformism is not anathema, the hopes and achievements of the Whitlam years remain historically and politically praiseworthy.¹⁴⁴

This historical perspective is usually not vastly removed from that of democratic or interventionist liberals – for whom government intervention in the economy is necessary but for whom there is no possibility of society moving ‘beyond’ capitalism or
any of its central features – though Whitlam’s mode of government is as often viewed here as a warning of excessive democratisation as a triumph of progressive political principle. This assessment by *Canberra Times* editor Jack Waterford in a 1999 issue of *Eureka Street* is representative of the democratic-liberal field of discussion:

We are a generation past Dunstan and past Whitlam, but have scarcely found a politician since with any of the power to inspire ideals, make people change their lives or articulate a vision about where the nation ought to be going. Dunstan’s impact was not merely on the Labor Party. He and Whitlam established an agenda that operated as powerfully on the other side of politics as on their own. Few conservative politicians today would speak in the language of politics pre-Dunstan ... even though the modern trend is to attack the size of the public sector and doubt the power of collective action.\(^{145}\)

Democratic liberals accept a role for government in social and economic planning, but many of them also accept, in the post-Whitlam era, the alleged inefficiencies and inflationary impact of big government.\(^{146}\) Those who accept a greater contemporary role for government generally have a less critical view of the Whitlam economic record, seeing the demise of this government as a result of international conditions rather than economic mismanagement and scandal.\(^{147}\) For democratic liberals generally, the attraction to economic management and social reform remain, and the legacy of Whitlamite optimism is respected if not revered.

Liberals of a more culturally traditional or conservative bent did not share the hopes of Whitlam’s ALP but have in many cases been as displeased with the post-1975 neo-classical liberal governmental model. Genuine conservatives,\(^{148}\) sometimes referred to as the ‘Old Right’, believe the ‘permissive’ liberal values of this era were misplaced but they do accept the responsibility of government to actively manage the economy, particularly through the erection of tariffs. Perhaps the central statement on the Whitlam government written from this ideological perspective is ‘Economic Rationalism and its Consequences’, by John Carroll. Carroll argues that the economic difficulties experienced by Australia in the post-Whitlam period are primarily the result of the policy and philosophy of neo-classical liberalism:

By the 1980s ... a new mandarin caste of fanatical, free-market economists had taken over the top levels of the key policy-making departments in the Canberra bureaucracy – Treasury, Finance, and Prime Minister’s. The way
had been prepared since the late 1960s by a rationalist Tariff Board, which Whitlam had expanded into the Industries Assistance Commission, later renamed the Industry Commission. They were, in true mandarin style, more devoted to the purity of their theory and the clean workings of its logic than to looking with open eyes and some intellectual scepticism at what reality was telling them.\textsuperscript{149}

The New Right defined itself as much by its critique of the conservative Right, and democratic liberals (including the ‘Wets’, as Margaret Thatcher would label them), as by its opposition to Whitlamite social democracy and socialism. For this ideological grouping, the hopes of the Whitlam era were deluded and remain a primary cause of Australia’s ongoing social and economic difficulties. In his substantial study of postwar Australian liberalism and conservatism, David Kemp suggests that the crisis which confronted Australian society during the Whitlam period resulted from the fact that government had grown too large, constituting such an impediment to the freedom of the individual that social stability and economic growth could no longer be sustained. Kemp concludes that a return to a more fundamental, individualist form of liberalism had become necessary:

While in many respects the Whitlam government in 1972 seemed to be expressing views that crossed party boundaries, by 1975 it had contributed to a crisis that shattered the consensus. As government spending rose rapidly in pursuit of equal opportunity and quality of life objectives so did taxes, and their inevitable restriction on private opportunities ... The ‘Whitlam-shock’ ended the consensus on the role of government and exposed the tensions in Australian liberal thought in an unmistakable manner.\textsuperscript{150}

In Boris Frankel’s 1992 opinion:

It is ... clear that, after twenty years, the Right in Australia have not yet recovered from the socio-cultural practices and values of the Whitlam years. In fact, much of the Right’s future agenda is oriented to the past: the need to eradicate twenty years of ‘Whitlamism’. The brief period in office of the Whitlam government had a sobering affect on the Right in Australia. Thrown into disarray after decades of conservative rule, confronted by an upsurge of social and cultural reform movements, the Right had to regroup and confront the anti-conservative challenge head-on.\textsuperscript{151}
Ten years later the New Right commentator Christopher Pearson laments the existence of “the Whitlamite agenda (which) staked out the ground for most of the twenty-five-year-long debates that followed the government’s collapse”.\textsuperscript{152} Economic rationalists and ‘Third Wayers’ within the labour movement have also criticised Whitlam’s progressive social and economic policies, often while seeking to use the mythology of hope inspired by this government to retain working-class and social democratic support.\textsuperscript{153}

The final ideological take on this narrative of hope and disillusion is that of postmodernist intellectuals.\textsuperscript{154} Postmodern\textit{ism} is most literally the theory that our present social conditions are historically unique, the belief that public and private life has been fundamentally transformed by the historical forces that brought this change about. In an important sense, as Meaghan Morris has noted, Australian postmodernists were brought into existence as an identifiable intellectual grouping by the Dismissal. It was this event and the response to it by the labour movement and the Marxist Left that led many postmodernists to give up their active involvement with political movements. Addressing a conference in 1985 Morris says:

\begin{quote}
I can’t help being aware that this is the first time in almost ten years that I’ve attended a large, mixed, cross-activity talkfest run by ‘The Left’. It will be ten years this November, in fact, for the last Big Political Event I went to in Sydney was a large meeting of feminists held to discuss the fall, or tripping, of the Whitlam government in 1975.\textsuperscript{155}
\end{quote}

And she continues: “For me and for quite a few kindred spirits, those events [surrounding the Dismissal] in 1975 marked the end of a whole period of classical political activism”.\textsuperscript{156} Like the leaders of the federal ALP, who learned from the experience of Whitlam that power in capitalist society lies with the capitalist class,\textsuperscript{157} many postmodernists came to the conclusion that direct forms of political confrontation and opposition were outdated in contemporary reality.\textsuperscript{158}

Cultural discourse in the decade after 1975, Morris argues, became specialised and professionalised, as a result of complex social change. Those who, like her, work in the culture industries (“all those ‘areas’ ... which add up to the wreck of the old concept of ‘superstructure’”),\textsuperscript{159} are seen to have a unique insight into the contemporary moment, part of this insight being an awareness that generalised critique and organised democratic opposition to centres of power are no longer tenable. This postmodernist triumphalism is
lent support by Morris’s description of the non-postmodernist Left as “paranoid” and “nostalgic”.\textsuperscript{160}\textsuperscript{161}

The assertion that power has become more fluid and de-centred within postmodernity is contradicted by increasing corporate centralisation and conglomerations, while the conservative implications of defining ‘real’ intellectuals as those who work within the mainstream or corporate media, hardly need spelling out. Moreover, Morris’s own work, supposedly grounded on a critique of totalising theory, can itself be seen as an attempt at massive generalisation.\textsuperscript{162} The basic features of this postmodern triumphalist view of history and of intellectual debate have been repeated many times over the years, though postmodernists rarely bother with historical exposition. Most recently, Lindsay Barrett has written about the Whitlam government and its demise, in his \textit{The Prime Minister's Christmas Card}, as the inevitable manifestation of a postmodern reality replacing a modern one.\textsuperscript{163}

Clearly, historical interpretation has not been unsullied by the political interests and motivations of intellectuals. For socialists, social democrats and democratic liberals, the hopes of the Whitlam era were more or less laudable and remain attractive if not always practically achievable. Conservative liberals, neo-classical liberals and postmodernists see these hopes as deluded and, in the case of the liberal groupings, as causing, more or less, Australia’s present social fragmentation, discontent and inefficiency. These competing readings of this historic journey may be labelled ‘morose but hopeful’ (social democratic), ‘sad and sceptical’ (socialist), ‘resigned but unhappy’ (democratic liberal), ‘disgusted and confused’ (conservative liberal), ‘spiteful’ (neo-classical liberal) and ‘smug’ (postmodernist). But within each ideological grouping there is, importantly, a clear nexus between views of the past, the present and of a good society. There is clearly a dialectic at work between the Whitlam and post-Whitlam periods, in which the past is interpreted in a way which legitimates the particular understanding of the present and of a desirable future.

\textbf{Ideology and the Mass Media}

Although this history of the Whitlam period is strongly contested in the public sphere as a whole, the ideological stalemate identified above is not evident within the mass media.
Rather, the historical interpretation that suits the interests of the most powerful social groups tends to dominate. An examination of the representation of the Whitlam government in articles published in 2002 and indexed in the Dow Jones interactive database reveals the dominance of a neo-classical liberal reading of the Whitlam government and its legacy. The majority of pieces characterise the Whitlam government as an incompetent economic manager. It is also routinely referred to as having been brought down by self-induced ‘crises’, rather than the actions of the Governor-General, Chief Justice Barwick, the corporate sector, Joh Bjelke-Petersen, the CIA, the mainstream media itself, or even the unions. Several articles are devoted to correcting ‘myths’ surrounding this government, namely the popular association of it with social justice reforms, though none at all defend its economic record. Where support for the Whitlam legacy does arise, this is often couched in nostalgic and romantic terms which tend to affirm, rather than question, its oft-asserted contemporary irrelevance. As Bolton states, “it was unfortunate that the Whitlam government’s record suggested that social change could be achieved only at the expense of level-headed political leadership and sound economic management”. This crucial contention, that economic growth and social justice, the economy and society, freedom and equality, exist in an oppositional relationship – a contention directly reliant on classical liberal philosophy and neo-classical liberal social analysis and diametrically opposed to the philosophy and analysis of the Whitlam government – is the most often and most vehemently asserted ‘lesson’ to be drawn from this government.

An article by *Fortune* magazine writer Anthony Paul, published in the Brisbane *Courier Mail*, is representative of the ongoing New Right preoccupation with the Whitlam legacy. Occasioned by the then forthcoming SBS television interview with Gough Whitlam conducted by John Faulkner, Paul is moved to write, he claims, out of a desire to correct the “deeply flawed history” that results from “the program’s failure to probe closely the Whitlam government’s extraordinary economic bungling”. This failure, Paul suggests further, and the desire to turn Whitlam “into what we are repeatedly told is a ‘national icon’”, is in turn a reflection of the power of “Sydney’s leftist media elites”, who wish to produce “unalloyed Labor propaganda” and “to obscure the mess Australia really was in the early 1970s”. “In April 1975”, Paul asserts, “the Australian economy
was in its worst shape since the Great Depression of the early 1930s. Largely as a result of its high-spending policies, the Labor government was running a $2.5 billion deficit, or 5 per cent of the then gross national product”. Paul goes on to remark that Whitlam was the son of “one of Australia’s most senior and most highly paid civil servants”, that his government “plunged into a socialist-minded restructuring of the economy”, that the economic rationalists in cabinet during the economic crises of 1974 were held back by “unreconstructed socialists”, and that as Treasurer Cairns was unable “to say no to colleagues’ pet programs”. The “Khemlani Affair” is described as a surreptitious attempt to commit the nation to a massive debt. There are also the familiar New Right charges of government ‘crowding out’ private enterprise (“during the three years Labor was in office, the number of public servants increased by 12.6 per cent. Employment in private industry in the same period rose just 1.2 per cent”) and of welfare agencies ‘capturing’ state resources for their own interests (“Soaring administrative overheads negated many of the well-meaning programs that Labor did introduce. Perhaps the most poignant example was welfare for Aborigines”), a key tenet of New Right ‘public choice’ theory. This government was in the end “swept away” when Kerr “fired” Whitlam, Paul’s choice of words suggesting that it was the prerogative of Kerr to do so, as it is the prerogative of a boss to ‘fire’ misbehaving or incompetent employees.

Paul, a highly-paid writer for Rupert Murdoch and other individual and corporate interests, aligns himself with the ‘common’ person and defends a pseudo-empirical, ‘common sense’ notion of truth, against those who would seek to complicate matters, the intellectual ‘elites’, whoever they may be, who are blinded by their allegiance to Labor and socialism, these two things amounting to much the same thing. There is no consideration of the global economic situation and the complex causes of economic difficulties that impacted in fundamental ways upon Australia and the rest of the world. There never was in fact authorisation for a loan to be obtained by Khemlani, only for the offer of it to be obtained: Khemlani was not an authorised agent, merely an intermediary. The highest inflation ever experienced in Australia actually occurred during the reign of Menzies. Similarly, Australians are taxed more now than they ever have been before, and both unemployment and inflation levels under Whitlam were lower than at times under Hawke and Keating. Paul’s article serves to conflate
Whitlamite social democracy with economic mismanagement. The perception is perpetuated that there is a zero-sum, oppositional relationship between government spending and economic progress, between social justice and economic growth, between planning for and achieving a just society.

While Paul’s is perhaps the most strident, similar themes reappear in several other articles of 2002, which incorporate the history of the Whitlam government into a worldview consistent with classical liberal assumptions, or ideology. Anne Henderson, Christine Jackman, the editors of the Herald-Sun, Phillip Niddrie, Miranda Devine, Nick Richardson and Dennis Atkins write articles critical of the myth-making that takes place around this government, by which they mean the perception of its having introduced politically progressive and social justice policies, without questioning myths surrounding the causes of the economic difficulties it experienced. Peter Munro, Stephen Loosley, Nick Richardson and Alan Ramsay write nostalgic pieces lamenting the lost vision of the Whitlam era, but none of these explicitly question the rationality of present policy frameworks or the popular view of economic policy as simply a managerial process: “the euphoria of 1972 seemed to have dissipated into a kind of sour disappointment”, concludes Richardson in a symptomatically resigned and analytically weak assessment.

This brief investigation of the representation of the Whitlam government within the mainstream press suggests that versions of the history of this government, which are as grounded in the known facts and truth of the time as the neo-classical liberal version, but ideologically opposed to it, are not widely visible, let alone explained in depth. There is then some support for the view that the post-1975 dominance of neo-classical liberal public policy has been enabled by the establishment of and capitalisation on popular resentment and opposition toward Whitlamism, and by the managed exclusion of policy alternatives from public dialogue. It seems that the present dominance of neo-classical liberal public policy is in part sustained through the maintenance of a neo-classical liberal interpretation of Whitlam and the Whitlam period as the hegemonic interpretation within the most politically important and powerful cultural organs of society, those of the mass media.
Conclusion

Since contemporary Australia is in a sense defined by the Whitlam period – its prime historical Other – the maintenance of power is at least partially dependent on the maintenance of control over popular understandings of Whitlam and Whitlamism. A search of the Dow Jones interactive database, which indexed major Australian newspapers, revealed that the Whitlam government was mentioned 923 times between 1999 and 2002, in comparison to 42 references to the McMahon government, 570 references to the Fraser government and 820 references to the Hawke government.\(^{185}\) The journalists Mike Steketee, Errol Simper and Penelope Wilson note that “the Gough Legacy ... was relatively short lived, yet the Whitlam government still has an extraordinary grip on the public imagination”.\(^{186}\) Graeme Duncan has observed that Whitlam “is a kind of admonitory judgment on the present”,\(^ {187}\) while Peter Beilharz and Patrick Troy suggest that Whitlam is “a collective noun, more, a grounding metaphor of that formative experience which still shadows us”.\(^ {188}\) As demonstrated above, the past is commonly interpreted in a way which legitimates a particular ideological understanding of the present and future. The very dominance of ideology over evidence and logic within this highly contested history suggests that at this time what might be more useful than a reassertion of evidence and logic is a more extended and thorough-going exploration of the role of ideology within this debate, its particular origins, nature and functions. The rest of the thesis is an attempt to identify the specific cultural origins of Whitlamite social democracy and Australian neo-classical liberalism.

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2 As Kerr notes, this was “the first time supply had actually been denied federally”. *Matters for Judgement*, p.2. This directly placed at risk the government’s capacity to govern.
4 Ibid., p.3.
5 “Mr Whitlam, as the threat became real that the money needed for the conduct of government would run out, stated his intention of governing with the aid of financial arrangements which I believe would have been makeshift, precarious and probably illegal even if obtainable, and further destructive of public stability and confidence”. Ibid., p.3.
6 Kerr chooses as his book’s epigraph, for example, a quotation from the American Declaration of Independence: “Governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed”. In chapter 1: ‘The Consent of the Governed’, Kerr argues that the right of the Governor-General to dismiss the elected Government of the day and bring about a general election is exemplary of this
democratic spirit, which he says also informs the Australian Constitution. See Matters for Judgement, p.7. Kerr refers as well to – while not providing evidence of – a growing “public demand for and expectation of action by the Governor-General” in the lead-up to the Dismissal. Ibid., p.335.

7 Kerr writes that his book “should be published now because in the public interest the facts of my role in the happenings of 1975 should be known – in the interests of truth and of maintaining freedom of discussion and the development of knowledge on matters of great public importance”. “My decision” to dismiss the Whitlam government, he explains, “rested upon constitutional principle”. “I hope the arguments that prevail”, he states, “will be those founded on truth and reason and aimed at pursuing sense and perhaps a more resistant and resilient consensus for the future”. Kerr quotes the letter of Chief Justice Sir Garfield Barwick, putting Barwick’s legally and constitutionally irrelevant view that Kerr had a legal right to dismiss the government. “I knew the decision”, states Kerr, was “constitutionally unavoidable”. “A striking fact emerging ... from the great number of supportive letters that flooded in to Government House after the Dismissal”, states Kerr, “from people having clearly a wide range of education and background, was the grasp exhibited of the essential realities of what had taken place”. Ibid., pp.vii, 6, 7, 342–344, 349, 4–5.

8 See descriptions of Whitlam and his government above and below. Kerr also writes: “There was plenty of evidence that demonstrations, especially the violent ones, were organised by militant left-wing unionists and students”. “Some faces”, he says, “recurred in widely separated locations, and in each State they included individuals who were well known to the police”. Ibid., p.383.

9 Ibid., p.6.

10 According to Clem Lloyd and Andrew Clark, by 11 November 1975 “the chance of unilateral action by Senators to get out of the constitutional impasse was increasing each day. Fraser was running out of time. There is retrospective agreement among senior members of the Parliamentary Liberal Party that they could have held on for only a few more days. Very likely, the crisis would have been over by the end of the week, with the Coalition accepting a setback and letting the budget bills pass. It is even possible that the collapse of Opposition resistance would have occurred on 11 November”. Kerr’s King Hit, Cassell Australia, Stanmore and North Melbourne, 1976, p.270.


13 Ibid., p.9.

14 See endnote 6.


16 As Geoffrey Bolton notes, “much more than his original dismissal of Whitlam, this was a gross breach of constitutional practice”. “But by this time”, Bolton goes on to suggest, “nobody was worrying much about technicalities”. The Middle Way, p.242.

17 Horne, Death of the Lucky Country, p.12. In his The Truth of the Matter (Penguin, Ringwood, 1979), Whitlam asserts that “nothing in Sir John Kerr’s (Matters for Judgement) and nothing which has been revealed since 11 November 1975 calls for modification of (Horne’s) assessment”, p.136.


20 Kerr, Matters for Judgement, p.388.


22 Kerr, Matters for Judgement, p.352.

23 Ibid., p.389.

24 Ibid., p.398.

25 Ibid., p.381.

26 Ibid., p.396.

In order to defeat the arch-democrat Whitlam.

Prince

Australian interest in investigative journalism was strong”. Griffen-Foley,

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Party with techniques no newspaper has used within my adult lifetime, but to condemn these four

speculation about any decisions Kerr and Murdoch may have reached from their discussions.

Pentagon Papers and the

watchdog was particularly high. The

Middle Way

was editorially hostile to the Whitlam government”. The


According to Bolton: “Public perceptions of the Whitlam government were shaped by a series of

ineptitudes which even the most benevolent of media would have found hard to present sympathetically”.

“But these events”, he goes on to note, “were not turning to Fraser’s advantage. As October gave way to

November every week’s public opinion polls told the same story: the pendulum was swinging back to the

Whitlam government”. The

Death of the Lucky Country, pp.238, 240.

Griffen-Foley,


Horne argues for example that in the 1975 elections the media became “more visible campaigners than

the leaders themselves”. “From day to day”, he writes, the media “increasingly presented (the Whitlam
government) as a government of crooks and clowns”. “During the election”, he continues, “four of the

Sydney newspapers, the Sun, the Australian, the Daily Mirror and the Daily Telegraph went after the Labor

Party with techniques no newspaper has used within my adult lifetime, but to condemn these four

newspapers is not to praise the others”. Moreover, “what made (Fraser) safe in his campaign style of

diversion and evasion was that in this election journalist-commentators prominent in elections since 1969

were sat on ... In the degrading election of 1975 this meant that routine methods of exposure of evasion and

diversion were not used, or were used inadequately”. Death of the Lucky Country, pp.65, 66, 69, 70. As

Bolton states: “It was certainly the case that by 1975 every major Australian newspaper, with the partial

exception of the Newcastle Morning Herald, was editorially hostile to the Whitlam government”. The

Middle Way, p.238. According to Lindsay Barrett, “the Whitlam Government was in no position to employ

armies of public relations workers to blur the lines between its activities and those of the media, but nor,
even if it had been, would this have been in keeping with the spirit of the government”. ‘Whitlam,

Modernity and the End of History’, in Hocking and Lewis,

It’s Time Again, p.412.

See Munster, A Paper Prince, pp.95–114. He also notes: “The Murdoch papers were the last to become

hostile to the Whitlam Government, but when they did, they were the most strident”. John Hallows, a

“resident conservative columnist”, was brought in to write the Australian’s editorials on a fee basis,

replacing the more liberal Robert Duffield. Ibid., pp.107, 108.

Griffen-Foley,

Party Games, p.230.

“In the mid-1970s both journalistic and public confidence in the role of the news media as democracy’s

watchdog was particularly high. The New York Times’ willingness to publish the revelations from the

Pentagon Papers and the Washington Post’s exposé of the Watergate break-in were still fresh and

Australian interest in investigative journalism was strong”. Griffen-Foley, Party Games, p.216.

“1975 was a turning point in the political influence of the press. Not since 1949 had newspapers waged a

more virulent campaign to hound a government from office. And they were completely successful.

Malcolm Fraser’s conservative Liberal-Country Party coalition defeated the Labor party by a record

majority. But this was the peak of press influence. It is unlikely to gain it again”. Keith Windschuttle, The

Media: A New Analysis of the Press, Television, Radio and Advertising in Australia (third edn), Penguin,

Ringwood, 1988, p.307. This is because, Windschuttle suggests, the press is obviously biased, and

swinging voters are least likely to read the press.

Munster builds a convincing case for this interpretation of events, while perhaps wisely resisting open

speculation about any decisions Kerr and Murdoch may have reached from their discussions. A Paper

Prince, pp.107–109. It seems that the arch-monarchist and the arch-capitalist formed an unholy alliance in

order to defeat the arch-democrat Whitlam.

In contrast to 1972, the Liberal National Party coalition in 1975 ran a highly sophisticated and media-
savvy campaign. Malcolm Fraser and the other conservative leaders and strategists did not spell out policy

detail, instead focusing on the creation of broad impressions – of the ALP as incompetent, dictatorial and

possibly criminal – and of themselves as skilled economic managers of sound social standing and cultural

heritage. Broadly speaking, conservative political advertising (following the ALP example from 1972)

concentrated on stimulating an emotional response rather than on raising awareness of complex issues.
Television, television journalists and television journalism played a relatively greater role in this campaign, reinforcing the dominance of impression over reason, propaganda over critical debate. As Griffen-Foley explains: "Liberal strategists changed the way press conferences were structured, separating television reporters and cameras from press correspondents. The television team always went first, meaning that television reporters could not watch the experienced newspaper journalists in action and pirate the more embarrassing questions for use when they got Fraser in front of the camera for an interview". *Party Games*, p.233.


By ‘politically progressive policy’ I mean policy that leads to a decentralisation of economic wealth.


*Ibid.*, p.129. Singleton was at the time handling the conservatives’ political advertising campaign.


Bolton lends weight to this view. He writes that prior to the Dismissal “the critical factor was finance. The private banks could not be counted on to bail out the government if it ran short of funds, and although the government was exploring several ingenious alternatives none was obviously workable”. *The Middle Way*, p.241. See also Sexton, *Illusions of Power*, p.283: “In the context of implementing such a program [of reform] it is apparent that Parliament is only a tool – although a vital one – in the process of implementation”; and p.xiv: “In the face of ... realities, (the Whitlam) government discovered that many of its own sources of power were illusory”. See also Nathan Hollier, ‘From Hope to Disillusion? The Legacy of the Whitlam Government in Australian Policy and Culture’, in Hocking and Lewis, *It’s Time Again*, p.432: “Arguably the fundamental flaw of (Whitlam’s) philosophy and that of his government was to mistake the human capacity to control social outcomes for the capacity of government to do so”.


On Friedman’s 1975 Australian tour see Lindsay Barrett, ‘Whitlam, Modernity and the End of History’, in Hocking and Lewis, *Whitlam and Modern Labor*, pp.404–413. He notes that the tour was sponsored by a firm of stockbrokers.

There is however debate over whether or not the final budget of the Whitlam government, that of Treasurer Bill Hayden brought down in August 1975, was guided by Keynesian or monetarist and neo-classical liberal philosophy and theory. Rowse argues that although this budget contained a greater emphasis on monetary restraint than had generally been the case within Keynesian-influenced budgets, it was still consistent with Keynesian public policy. See his ‘The Social Democratic Critique of the Australian Settlement’, in Hocking and Lewis, *It’s Time Again*, p.240. An influential statement of the opposing view is P. Groenewegen and B. McFarlane, *A History of Australian Economic Thought*, Routledge, London, 1990, p.216. In Tim Battin’s persuasive assessment, “at the very least, the 1975 budget
was anti-Keynesian in sentiment”. *Abandoning Keynes: Australia’s Capital Mistake*, Macmillan, London, 1997, p.84. Whitlam himself appears to take a pragmatic view, endorsing Keynesian public policy but praising the Hayden budget as economically and politically effective. “Without a doubt”, Whitlam writes, “Hayden was the best Treasurer of any party during the 1970s ... As most commentators accepted and as the Opposition privately admitted, the Budget had the stamp of responsibility”. *The Whitlam Government*, pp.212, 213.


60 The Keynesian economist and author Michael Stewart writes for example that Friedman’s monetarism “is fatally flawed” because “it starts from unreal assumptions about how the economy works”. “The most unreal assumption of all”, he goes on to say, “is the same assumption that underlay the classical economics of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, to which monetarism is in many respects a throwback. This is the assumption that the economy is self-stabilising at full employment”. *Keynes and After* (third edn), Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1986, p.178. Similarly, Coombs writes in 1981 that he finds the monetarist model “defective” because “it is based upon a general equilibrium view of the economic system, of the way the system would look when the forces working to bring the various sub-systems into equilibrium internally and with one another, have successfully achieved their purpose. It does not deal with the processes by which that end is reached, nor what happens if non-market factors impair the movement towards equilibrium”. *Trial Balance*, p.179.

61 Whitlam, *The Whitlam Government*, pp.2–3. He also writes: “During the years of the postwar economic boom, questions of economic management were scarcely deemed to require original answers. The broad principles, and indeed objectives, of Keynesian economics held sway over the major parties”, p.184.

62 Ibid., p.3.

63 Paul Boreham, Stewart Clegg and Geoff Dow attest for example that Keynesian economics derived from “the realisation which began with the Enlightenment, that social existence is and always has been amenable to volitional intervention”. *Class, Politics and the Economy*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London and Boston, 1986, p.325. And Whitlam has stated: “The great tradition which links the American and French revolutionaries of the Age of Reason with the modern parties of social reform is the tradition of optimism about the possibility of human improvement and human progress through the means of human reason”. Quoted in Graeme Duncan, ‘Whitlam and the Problems of Social Democracy’, *Meanjin* 45, 1986, pp.471–472.


65 Cockett, *Thinking the Unthinkable*, p.12.


67 On this point see Battin, *Abandoning Keynes*, p.100. And though it is generally accepted that Fraser did not introduce a full free-market policy program, Whitlam is correct to point out: “By and large, the actions of the Fraser Government matched its rhetoric. It did cut social policy spending; it did oppose wage rises at every opportunity; it did destroy wage indexation and replace it with the Treasury-advocated decentralised system; it did impose tough ceilings on the Public Service; it did adopt an inflation-first economic strategy; and it did on numerous occasions raise official interest rates in a bid to control the money supply”. *The Whitlam Government*, p.227.

68 See for example Stewart, *Keynes and After*, p.157: “The most important reason of all for the emergence of monetarism as the predominant economic doctrine of the 1970s and 1980s was the simplest of all: monetarism promised a cure for inflation”.


70 Pusey, *Middle Australia*, pp.7–8.

71 Ibid., p.8. Pusey notes that the Trilateral Commission, “comprising business leaders from North America, Europe and Japan, is but one of the five leading global business organisations that were formed to advance and coordinate corporate policy interests. The others are the World Economic Forum, the Bilderberg Conference, the International Chamber of Commerce and the World Business Council for Sustainable Development. Their impact has been immense and has led to what some prominent scholars now call the ‘transnational capitalist class’.” Ibid., p.209.
72 Ibid., p.8.
73 Cockett avers: “The counter-revolution in British economic and political thinking since the Second World War was very much the result of the work of individuals. It was a conscious and, in the end, successful attempt to turn the tide of political and economic thinking in a particular direction”. Thinking the Unthinkable, p.4. And Battin argues that “the problems thought to be economic in nature ... are more fundamentally political”. Abandoning Keynes, p.8.
75 “An understanding of Keynesianism which contends that unemployment and inflation could not occur together is grossly deficient. This deficiency is not only in attributing stagflation to the practice of Keynesian policy, but in ascribing Phillips Curve Keynesianism to a series of phenomena that left-Keynesians, post-Keynesians, and Kaleckians already had warned against well before Phillips had published his influential article in 1958”. Battin also makes the relevant observation that: “If an association between economic ideas, the resultant policies, and the performance outcomes of those policies were to explain why policies are reversed, we should have seen a reversal of the post-1975 program by now”. Abandoning Keynes, pp.123, 244.
76 Monetarists and other neo-classical liberals argued that government intervention in the economy was counter-productive because, among other reasons, the economic effects of monetary and fiscal policy did not register immediately, but only after a time ‘lag’. The monetarists and neo-classical liberals argued that this meant that the problems interventionist policy was designed to address had almost always changed by the time these policies took effect.
77 Coombs, Trial Balance, p.179.
78 Pusey, Economic Rationalism in Canberra, p.206.
79 In Whitlam’s account: “Compulsory price and income controls could not have solved inflation in 1974 without widespread community acceptance, but the existence of price and income powers in the hand of the Federal Government would have brought about an agreement on an income policy more quickly and have made such an agreed policy more effective”. The Whitlam Government, p.203. On the Keynesian credentials of the Whitlam government, Battin concludes: “On Keynesian social democratic criteria, the Whitlam government fairs well”. Abandoning Keynes, p.243. Ironically, Bob Hawke, as President of the ACTU, rejected this policy initiative, on the grounds that a future government might use it to lower wages. Later, as Prime Minister, Hawke oversaw the introduction of a prices and incomes policy which led to just this outcome (a decline in real wages) because of his government’s unwillingness to try to limit corporate profits and white-collar salaries.
81 Boreham, Dow and Leet argue in 1999 for example that “like the OECD economies as a whole, Australia has been in recession for twenty-five years and despite high economic growth by international standards ... has not yet entered a post-recession phase”. They also argue that “the political responses to the recession after 1974 actually produced many of the outcomes that we have been living with since, most notably structural unemployment”. Room to Manoeuvre, pp.6–7, 19. As structural unemployment continues to characterise Australian and other OECD economies, it is doubtful that subsequent economic ‘booms’ would have led them to reject their assessment.
83 An example is Michael Stewart, Keynes and After.
84 See for example Battin, who argues that the economic factors had a “social (and) political context” and that the collapse of the Bretton Woods agreement was a reflection of political, “or, in the case of the Vietnam War, military decisions”. Abandoning Keynes, p.119.
85 In the Australian context this general position has been elaborated upon by Humphrey McQueen (see for example ‘Making Capital Tick’, Overland 170, 2003, pp.92–101) and intellectuals associated with Arena. For accounts of this Arena position see Scalmer, Dissent Events, pp.125–134; and Hollier, ‘The Importance of Class: Points of Tension Between Arena and Overland’, Arena Journal 15, 2000, pp.149–157.
88 Robbie Robertson, *The Three Waves of Globalisation: A History of a Developing Global Consciousness*, Zed Books, London and New York / Fernwood Publishing, Nova Scotia, 2003, p.182. In the opinion of Coombs, Keynes’ attempt to establish an International Trade Organisation following the Second World War “failed because no changes to the existing economic order could even be considered without United States support. The Charter was rejected ... not because it was unworkable, not because the Keynesian modifications of traditional economic theory which had shaped it were intellectually invalid, but simply because it did not meet the political requirements of the United States domestic scene”. *Trial Balance*, p.104. Emy and Hughes add: “The New Right was an international phenomenon among liberal democracies. In America and Britain especially, the main tendencies in New Right thinking represented an attempt to reverse the perceived ‘decline of the West’ and restore the economic and political strength of those societies”. *Australian Politics*, p.191. For a detailed account of Keynes’ participation in the Bretton Woods conference see Robert Skidelsky, *John Maynard Keynes: A Biography. Volume 3: Fighting For Britain, 1937–1946*, Macmillan, London, 2000.
90 Ibid., p.213.
91 Ibid., p.213.
92 Ibid., p.213.
93 As Lindsay Barrett explains, “By 1947 ... it had become apparent in Washington that a potential international economic crisis (the so-called ‘dollar gap’) was developing due to the extreme wealth of the US in relation to the rest of the world, an imbalance which would eventually lead to the collapse of the US economy through the inability of any other nation to buy America’s exports. The result was the creation of the Marshall Plan to redevelop western Europe as an industrial region, and a series of initiatives aimed at reviving Japanese industrial production as a go-between linking the resources of the soon to be independent Asian nations with the factories and markets of the USA”. *The Prime Minister’s Christmas Card*, pp.48–49. For a more extensive account of this US policy and the reasons for it see William Borden, *The Pacific Alliance*, Madison, Wisconsin University Press, 1984.
94 John Kenneth Galbraith writes for example that prior to the collapse of the Soviet bloc, “aid ... especially from the United States, was, in part, a consequence of the cold war”. *The World Economy Since the Wars*, Sinclair-Stevenson, London, 1994, p.258.
95 Stewart, *Keynes and After*, p.213.
96 Coombs records for example that Sir Leslie Melville, Economist to the Commonwealth Bank of Australia, had “observed the willingness and capacity of the United States to make use of its dominant power in the Bretton Woods’ negotiations and in early issues facing the (International Monetary) Fund” and so was by the late 1940s “sceptical of it continuing to serve other than as an instrument of creditor attitudes”. Coombs notes also that Keynes’ motivations in arguing for an expansionist and increasingly equal postwar economic context were linked to his interest in advancing the political interests of Britain: “Gradually, as a result of ... discussions and Keynes’ influence, it came to be accepted that the United Kingdom’s best chance of restoring its international role lay in the achievement of an expanding world trade in which real incomes would be increasing in all countries”. *Trial Balance*, pp.47, 45.
97 Stewart, *Keynes and After*, p.213.
98 Ibid.
99 Ibid.
100 That is, the political dominance of the US ruling class over debt-ridden national governments has certainly been strengthened by the inability of these debtor governments to make payments to US private banks. For an account of this process see Susan George, *A Fate Worse than Debt*, Penguin, London, 1988.
101 Stewart, *Keynes and After*, p.214. For a more thorough-going account of the role of politics within US negotiations at Bretton Woods see Susan George and Fabrizio Sabelli, *Faith and Credit: The World Bank’s Secular Empire*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1994; especially their ‘In the Beginning’ chapter, pp.21–36. They note: “From the US point of view ... the postwar world had to have three major characteristics. First,
the Americans wanted free trade with no discrimination against US goods – easy enough to obtain, since
the US was virtually the only country left with a surfeit of goods for sale. Next, they wanted a favourable
climate for American investments in foreign economies – again, non-negotiable, since the US was also the
only major country left with substantial disposable savings. Finally, they wanted unimpeded access to raw
materials. The Bretton Woods Institutions were intended to provide for all three”, p.24. See also Skidelsky,

102 Bolton, The Middle Way, p.184. See also Paul Kennedy, The Rise and Fall of the Great Industrial
vast boom in spending on the war, precisely at a time when domestic expenditures upon Johnson’s ‘Great
Society’ were also leaping upward, badly affected the American economy”. This basic economic
proposition is generally accepted.

103 For the complaints of de Gaulle see Kennedy, The Rise and Fall of the Great Industrial Powers, p.561;
international monetary system ... could not survive [beyond 1973] because the financing of the Vietnam
war required large and prolonged balance of payments deficits by the US and hence surpluses by the rest of
the world. The US was exporting inflation, not as a result of any domestic price inflation, but through
external deficits. It was, in the end, no coincidence that all the major nations of the developed world
experienced inflation at the same time”.

104 Robertson, The Three Waves of Globalisation, p.194; emphasis added. In terms of the Australian
economy, Bolton writes: “much depended on the capacity of the United States to stabilise the western
economy. In 1971 Washington bowed to inflationary pressures by suspending the convertability of the
dollar into gold. The Bretton Woods Agreement, mainstay of the world’s free enterprise economies for the
past quarter-century, began to totter”. The Middle Way, p.187. See also Kennedy: “The Bretton Woods
system, very much a creation of the days when the United States was financially supreme, collapsed when
its leading pillar could bear the strains no more”. The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers, p.561; and J.
Gowa, Closing the Gold Window: Domestic Politics and the End of Bretton Woods, Ithaca, New York,
1983.

105 Stewart, Keynes and After, p.212.


107 Freudenberg, A Certain Grandeur, p.277. As Kennedy summarises, “In so many ways, symbolic as well
as practical, it would be difficult to exaggerate the impacts of the lengthy American campaign in Vietnam
and other parts of Southeast Asia upon the international power system”. The Rise and Fall of the Great
Powers, p.521. See also Whitlam, The Whitlam Government, pp.187–188; and Bolton, The Middle Way,
p.184.

108 See Noam Chomsky, The Fateful Triangle: The United States, Israel and the Palestinians, South End
Press, Boston, 1999. According to E.L. Wheelwright, this oil shock “was the direct result of the Arab-
Israeli conflict and the new found strength of OPEC. OPEC had gained strength from the revolutions in
Libya, Algeria and Iraq, and the rise of (corporate) independents and state-owned companies which
weakened the grip of the major [oil corporations]”. Wheelwright, Oil and World Politics: From Rockefeller
to the Gulf War, Left Book Club Cooperative Ltd, Sydney, 1991, p.28.

109 As Bolton writes, “It was only in October 1973, when OPEC decided to cut oil production as an answer
to American support of Israel, that the industrial world temporarily lost control of inflation”. The Middle
Way, p.218. For a more extended account see Andre Gunder Frank, Crisis: In the World Economy,

110 See E.L. Wheelwright, Oil and World Politics.

111 See Stewart, Keynes and After, p.216.

112 Ibid.

113 Stewart, Keynes and After, pp.216–217.

114 As Stewart summarises in an assessment that is still broadly true: “The result has not only been severe
domestic hardship in many of these countries [who have had to cut back on imports], but an adverse effect
on the exports of both developed and other developing countries. This has slowed down world growth, and
in turn made it even harder for debtor countries to export enough to pay for essential imports. The whole
vicious circle is a sad example of the kind of situation that Keynes, in the closing years of his life, had
hoped the postwar international arrangements would make it possible for the world to avoid”. Ibid., p.217.

120 Wheelwright, *Oil and World Politics*, p.xiv.
121 Ibid.
122 Keyneians and Marxists reject this assumption.
123 For Whitlam, the ALP is “one of the world’s great social democrat parties”. Whitlam, *The Whitlam Government*, p.2.
124 See Andrew Scott, ‘Meanings of “Modernisation”: the Distinctiveness of the Whitlam Government in the History of Labour Parties’, in Hocking and Lewis, *Whitlam and Modern Labor*, pp.444–464, at pp.448–449; and Carol Johnson, *The Labor Legacy: Curtin, Chifley, Whitlam, Hawke*, George Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1989, p.1. She says the governments referred to in her title were social democratic “in the modern, less radical sense of the term. They were not part of the earlier, European social democratic tradition which argued that gradual, cumulative reforms would lead to the creation of a socialist society in which the economy would be publicly owned and controlled. Rather, government policies, developed within a social harmony framework, aimed to create a humanised capitalist society which would be to the benefit of all”.
125 Frankel writes: “The ALP was not even a social democratic party despite the Whitlam government’s attempt to imitate certain West European social democratic policies”. From Prophets Deserts Come: The Struggle to Reshape Australian Political Culture, Boris Frankel and Arena Publishing, North Carlton, 1992, p.102.
126 Connell, *Ruling Class, Ruling Culture*, p.vii. According to Andrew Moore, this book’s “synoptic account of the forces that brought the Whitlam government to and from office remains, in my opinion, unrivalled. I might be a very lazy history lecturer but despite the millions of words that have been written since 1977, chapters 5–7 of *Ruling Class, Ruling Culture* remain the basis of my lectures on E.G. Whitlam”. Andrew Moore, ‘Bob Connell and the 50 Club’, in Hollier, ed., *Ruling Australia*, p.45. According to Connell’s University of Sydney website profile, *Ruling Class, Ruling Culture* was voted “in a recent survey of The Australian Sociological Association (TASA) to determine the most influential books in Australian sociology ... number 1”. See <http://applications.edfac.usyd.edu.au/about/admin/FMPro?-db=EDF_SD_staff-&format=staff_profile_template.html&-lay=web&code=RCON-&-Find> (accessed 20 March 2006).
127 This was in fact the hope of certain radical intellectuals within the party at the time, such as R.W. Connell. See for example Connell’s ‘The Transition to Socialism’, in G. Crough, Ted Wheelwright and Ted Wilsire, eds, *Australia and World Capitalism*, Penguin, Ringwood, 1980, pp.289–302.
131 Ibid., pp.2–3.
132 Ibid., pp.4–5.
133 Ibid., p.12.
134 Ibid., p.12.
135 Ibid., p.12.
136 Whitlam wrote in his 1979 ‘Preface’ to *The Truth of the Matter* that “Over the last year I have been gathering material for an account of the aspirations and achievements” of the Whitlam government, p.ix. No mention is made of any attempt to offer an account of the failures of this government.
138 Cottle, “‘Sailing to Byzantium’”, p.409.


142 Carol Johnson, *The Labor Legacy: Curtin, Chifley, Whitlam, Hawke*, George Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1989, p.54: “The flaws in the Whitlam model were present from the start. The most central flaws were the assumptions that a capitalist economy would function smoothly as long as it was properly managed; that the high levels of economic growth, necessary to Labor’s plans for social reform, could be achieved; and that a massive expansion of public expenditure would have no detrimental effects on the private sector”. Many leftists who supported elements of Whitlam’s policy program are also highly critical of his government for allowing the Indonesian annexation of East Timor and of Whitlam’s personal opposition to East Timorese independence. See for example Graham Pitts, ‘Raping East Timor’, *Overland* 159, 2000, pp.107–109; and Jim Aubrey, ‘Viva Timor L’Este: beyond silence, betrayal, cowardice and murder’, *Arena Magazine* 40, 1999, pp.25–30.

143 Connell and Irving, *Class Structure in Australian History*, p.205.

144 For example, David Burchall, social democrat editor of *Australian Left Review* in 1992, wrote: “The unstated premise behind the current liberal – social democratic revulsion against ‘economic rationalism’ is that there was another period, the ‘Whitlam years’, when nominally social democratic government had a raison d’etre and a concept of government of its own, and was not apparently parasitic on notions of the limits of government derived from classical economic liberalism’. ‘After Social Democracy’, *Australian Left Review* 143, 1992, p.26. See also Paul Strangio, *Keeper of the Faith: A Biography of Jim Cairns*, Melbourne University Press, 2002. Andrew Milner refers to having voted Labor until recently, “like most erstwhile sixties radicals ... partly out of a nostalgia for Whitlamism”. ‘Shock! Horror! Chattering Classes Vote Green!’, *Overland* 166, 2002, p.95. Humphrey McQueen suggests: “The Coalition and our country have paid a price for blaming the economic collapse on Whitlam, socialism, scandals and incompetence. No matter how ignorant or ill-conceived were Labor’s economic policies, they merely compounded the problems; they could not cause them. Billy McMahon’s retaining the prime ministership in 1972 would not have rescued the world’s monetary regime or averted the oil-price shock”. ‘Paying the Price of Victory’, the *Bulletin*, 18 May 1999, p.41.


147 An initial statement of this democratic liberal argument was made by Donald Horne in *Death of the Lucky Country*, Penguin, Ringwood, 1976.

148 By ‘genuine’ I mean those interested in preserving cultural traditions as a means of binding together the social order, rather than seeking to do this through the enforcement of free-market relations.


150 Kemp, ‘Liberalism and Conservatism in Australia Since 1944’, p.339. This argument is heavily influenced by Hayek’s 1944 *The Road to Serfdom*.

151 Frankel, *From Prophets Deserts Come*, p.130.

152 Christopher Pearson, ‘Who Will Come to the Aid of the Parties?’, the *Age*, 15 April, 2002, p.11. Note the description of the government collapsing rather than being dismissed.


154 Postmodernism is a notoriously amorphous term which must in particular be differentiated from poststructuralism, an identifiable body of work produced within the humanities and social science departments of universities from the late 1960s onwards.
Graham Maddox suggests on the basis of a reading of Connell’s *Ruling Class, Ruling Culture*, that “there is a case to be made that the trauma of the Dismissal diverted Labor towards adjustment to the ruling culture”. ‘Labor Tradition Revisited’, unpublished paper submitted to *Overland* magazine’s ‘Ruling Class, Ruling Culture’ conference, Trades Hall, Melbourne, 2002. He also puts this argument in *The Hawke Government and Labor Tradition*, Ringwood, Penguin, 1989. See also McQueen, ‘Paying the Price of Victory’, p.40: “Labor leaders had to learn from their 1974–75 debacle; returning to office in 1983 [they were] determined to target welfare expenditures and to trim taxes”.

Morris’s personal account has been called into question by Frankel, who suggests: “Compared to the political experiences of thousands of students at Monash and other universities in the 1960s, [Stephen] Muecke and Morris, like other ‘culturists’ of recent years, not only had little or no experience of political activity, but gained a great deal of their understanding of these turbulent events through film and cultural studies. Herein lies part of the answer as to why the 1960s politicisation of everyday life was replaced by little more than ‘culturalism’ in the 1980s”, *From Prophets Deserts Come*, p.355. This point is made in order to strengthen Frankel’s observation that “Precisely during the period of the most aggressive promotion of market capitalist values, radical political economy became unfashionable in academic institutions and other parts of society”, pp.11–12. According to Morris, however, she was at least a member of the Communist Party of Australia. See ‘Relations of Theory: a Dialogue’, an interview conducted with Morris by Stephen Muecke, in David Carter, ed., *Outside the Book: Contemporary Essays on Literary Periodicals*, Local Consumption Publications, Double Bay, 1991, pp.57–78.


The Dow Jones interactive database, now called ‘Factiva’, is a standard electronic library resource which indexes, among other publications, all of the major Australian newspapers.

As Premier of Queensland, Bjelke-Petersen in June 1975 acted against established precedent by refusing to allow the Labor Party to select its own replacement for a Queensland senator who had died. Instead, Bjelke-Petersen appointed an obscure Labor renegade committed to bringing down the government. This resulted in Labor being completely unable to control the Senate. See Bolton, *The Middle Way*, pp.236–237.


Tim Colebatch, ‘Tax Haul Hits New High: 31.8 %’, the *Age*, 13 April 2002, p.3. This trend continues.

Anne Henderson, ‘Martyr to his Own Cause’, *Courier Mail*, 6 November 2002, p.21, reprinted as ‘Aussie Icon, but with Feet of Clay’, *Canberra Times*, 8 November 2002, p.20

See for example Gerard McManus, ‘Kim Carr has Come in from the Wilderness Now Foes Wait to Count Cost’, *Sunday Herald-Sun*, 7 July 2002, p.26; Henderson, ‘Martyr to his Own Cause’ and ‘Aussie Icon, but with Feet of Clay’; Norman Abjorensen, ‘The New Guard – Were they Our Very Own Fascists?’, *Canberra Times*, 8 June 2002, p.8; and Dennis Atkins, ‘Sounds of the Suburbs’, *Courier Mail*, 2 February 2002, p.26. Writers and editors of the *Australian Financial Review*, several of whom had direct involvement with the government as Treasury bureaucrats, have since the Dismissal been amongst the most energetic and vehement New Right critics of this government.

‘Martyr to his Own Cause’, and ‘Aussie Icon, but with Feet of Clay’.


The concept of hegemony derives from Antonio Gramsci. According to Gramsci, a class achieves hegemony when it persuade other classes in society to accept its own moral, political and cultural values. If the ruling class is successful, the maintenance of hegemony will involve a minimum use of force. See Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, eds, Lawrence and Wishart, London & International Publishers, New York, 1971.

Search conducted on 29 January 2002.

This is the headline applied to their three articles in the *Australian*, 29–30 November 1997, pp.28–30.

Graeme Duncan, ‘Whitlam and the Problems of Social Democracy’, p.469.

Chapter Two

The Origins of Disillusion:
Cultural Sources of Australian Neo-Classical Liberalism

Donald Horne concluded his history of the 1966–72 Australian period, *A Time of Hope*, with the comment that: “Perhaps in the future there may be some discussion on Australian theories of revolutionary change that go beyond conventional marxist recipes”.1 “The discussion could begin”, he says, “by trying to explain why those with such high hopes in 1972 were, by 1975, so acquiescent”.2 The implication here is that at some level Whitlam and his supporters recognised that between 1972 and 1975 there had been a profound shift in the nature of Australian society and culture, that the very texture of Australian life now militated against the capacity of those who supported Whitlamism to reverse the apparent fate of this government. In chapter one it was argued that the fate of Whitlamism within history and readings of history was in no sense ‘inevitable’ or ‘natural’, that these things were strongly influenced by the distribution and use of power in society and the economy. However, if we are to begin to overcome the intellectual effects of this power, it is necessary, as Horne implies, to properly understand the historical and contemporary role of culture. For, as pointed out in the introduction, neither human consciousness nor social change are simply products of power: they are also expressions of culture, or of the imagined relationship between human beings and ‘nature’, that ‘culture’ essentially is. By making clear the particular role of culture within historical movement we can hope to obtain both a better – more detailed, sensitive and holistic – understanding of the nature of that movement, and a better awareness of how consciousness itself, including our reading of history, is culturally specific. The aim of this chapter then is to make clear, in general terms, the role of culture within the public policy shift from Keynesian Whitlamism to neo-classical liberalism, a shift that continues to define our contemporary moment and to an extent our consciousness. It is argued that the rise to dominance of neo-classical liberal public policy within Australia is most fundamentally an expression of Australia’s shifting political and cultural relations with the United States.
The US Origins of Neo-classical Liberalism

The neo-classical liberalism embraced by Malcolm Fraser in the lead-up to the federal elections of 13 December 1975 and, to varying degrees, by all Australian governments of both Labor and Liberal after this time, was most energetically and effectively lobbied for by American individuals, organisations and institutions. As Marion Sawer and David Kemp each make clear, the Australian New Right’s ideas, publications, research and education centres, or think-tanks, and even, to an extent, its projected image, were closely modelled on US examples, and often with the encouragement and patronage of these US ‘forebears’. Even in the case of germinal Australian New Right publications like *Rip Van Australia* (1977), written by Bob Howard and the advertising executive John Singleton in what Sawer describes as “a distinctively Australian and racy style”, the ideas were directly lifted from American New Right publications. Singleton was a member of and helped to obtain considerable publicity for the Workers Party, formed in Sydney on 16 January 1975. Again, the platform of this party was based on that of the Libertarian Party already established in the US.

The international New Right movement, that urged the wholesale privatisation of resources and deregulation of markets, developed to serve the interests of multinational corporations that in origin, ownership and outlook were mainly American. As Ted Wheelwright detailed in 1980:

> There are nearly 10,000 transnationals, if they are defined as having an affiliate in at least one other country. Most of these are [economically and politically] not very important, but the big ones are; those with affiliates in over eighteen countries and with sales of over a billion dollars. There are over 400 of these, and they account for over half the activity of the whole 10,000. Of these 400-odd, more than half belong to the USA.

And as Richard T. Hughes explains, Americans in the early twentieth century:

> clearly needed a policy that would promote global expansion and, at the very same time, allow Americans to believe that they were not imperialists but rather the benefactors of all humankind. The truth is, the strategy was close at hand. Indeed, it was part and parcel of the kind of expansion Americans had in mind: economic expansion. An economic conquest of the world depended upon the private sector, not upon government or the military. Government would facilitate commercial expansion by providing financial assistance, by negotiating a reduction of foreign restrictions, and
by making it clear to all parties that the American military stood ready to intervene if its business interests should be threatened. America could always defend a military action of this kind as defensive rather than aggressive.8

American expansion after 1945, write Philip Bell and Roger Bell, was thus “at once more pervasive and less visible than European colonisation”.9 American governments, they write “sought a free flow of capital, goods, and ideas – an open international order. Its influence was not based on the acquisition of territory, but on less formal economic, ideological, political, cultural, and strategic links with other states”.10 US power abroad “was carried by commerce, advertising, print and broadcast media, and consumer goods, as well as new inter-governmental arrangements and supra-national organisations like the Marshall and Truman Plans, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and NATO”.11 US aims, they state, were “cultural, educational, economic, and political as well as military”.12 “These aims” moreover “were interrelated and promoted by both private interests and governments”.13 And “opposition to ‘international communism’ and the exigencies of the Cold War provided a rationale for intervention – both overt and covert – in other societies”.14

As argued in the previous chapter, the decision of the US Nixon administration to abandon the system of global economic planning and stability put in place at Bretton Woods in 1944, a decision which led on to the adoption by that and many other nations of a neo-classical liberal public policy framework, was driven above all by geo-political considerations: most specifically the desire to protect and advance American power.

What is less well known, however, and what has been less comprehensively theorised, at least within Australia, is that neo-classical liberalism is also deeply and uniquely rooted in American culture. That is, the founding assumptions of neo-classical liberalism – that ‘agents optimise’, ‘markets clear’ and a good society is one based on the absence of government discrimination between individuals: negative freedom – have their strongest cultural basis within the American experience; or, more precisely, in the imagined experience of nature of the dominant American groups.15 As Louis Hartz argued in his influential work on the American liberal tradition, the politics of all the ‘new world’ (or what he calls ‘fragment’) societies were most profoundly influenced by
political traditions – and, it could be added, by cultural traditions – introduced by founding generations.¹⁶

While American society of course nurtures subordinate and resistant cultures, Hughes argues persuasively that contemporary American culture is founded on powerful myths that have their origins in the historically specific experience and beliefs of the Puritan ‘founding fathers’ and other groups. Robert Crunden contends that “American culture is essentially a peculiar mixture of Christianity, capitalism, and democracy, in that order”.¹⁷ Hughes agrees, suggesting that each of the core American cultural myths derives from “a religious understanding of reality”.¹⁸ “Contrary to colloquial usage”, he points out, “a myth is not a story that is patently untrue. Rather, a myth is a story that speaks of meaning and purpose, and for that reason it speaks truth to those who take it seriously”.¹⁹

“The first myth”, writes Hughes, the myth of the Chosen People, “emerged among the Puritans in the [seventeenth-century] colonial period of American history”.²⁰ The Puritans believed themselves to be chosen to restore the pure, original, ancient Christian church, that had been defiled by a Catholicism which the Church of England and its overly permissive Protestant monarchs had never adequately sloughed off. The Puritans would re-establish this pure Christianity by forming a national covenant with God, the theological importance of which was suggested by the Englishman William Tyndale in his massively influential 1534 English translation of and commentary on the New Testament.²¹ As Hughes explains, “Tyndale’s vision of a covenant was the soil in which the notion of chosenness would slowly germinate until, finally, it would spring full-blown in the United States”.²² Maintaining the human end of this covenant entailed a complete acceptance of the inescapable wickedness, weakness and fallibility of humanity and a complete submission to the will of God. Hughes relates that “Puritans never sought liberty for its own sake ... . They rather sought freedom to place themselves under the absolute control of the law of God, revealed in scripture”.²³ For the Puritans, it was thought to be the responsibility of each individual to find the task or vocation that God had set for him or her in life, and to work at that vocation to the best of one’s ability, for the glory of God.²⁴ Hughes argues:
In its best and highest form, this myth summoned the Puritans to ‘love brotherly without dissimulation’ and to ‘beare one anothers burthens’, as John Winthrop, the first governor of Massachusetts Bay Colony, reminded the settlers in 1630. In its original form chosenness meant ‘chosen for the good of the neighbour’. In time, however, Americans would absolutise this myth and claim that God chose the American people for special blessings and privileges in the world. At the very least, many still believe today that, in some mysterious way, God chose the American people for a special, redeeming role on the stage of world history.\(^{25}\)

Generations of immigrants, Hughes adds, have found the myth of the chosen nation to accord with their experience and desires.\(^{26}\)

The second myth in Hughes’ account, “the myth of Nature’s Nation”, is he says “a construct of the Enlightenment and emerged in the Revolutionary Era”.\(^{27}\) “In its highest and noblest form”, he suggests, “this myth essentially affirmed the promise of the American Creed, for it grounded the rights of all humankind in ‘nature’, that is, in the way things were meant to be”.\(^{28}\) However:

In order to justify the oppressive dimensions of American culture in the nineteenth century, some Americans would absolutise this myth as well. Many would argue, for example, that ‘nature’ had ‘decreed’ the removal of Native Americans and the enslavement of blacks ... To this day, our particular versions of democracy and capitalism seem so ‘natural’ that many Americans cannot imagine that there might be any viable alternatives.\(^{29}\)

The particularly esteemed place of natural science, and the pervasiveness of positivist and scientistic explanations and justifications of thought and action within scholarly and popular American intellectual life, is clearly linked to this historic, essentially religious valorisation of ‘nature’.\(^{30}\) The Puritan distrust in humanity leads to a hypertrophy of both scientistic and mystical forms of knowledge, at the expense of normative reason, based on shared interpretations, experiences and values.\(^{31}\) What results is a characteristically American response to the world, in which religious or quasi-religious fundamental, scientistic and essential laws of ‘nature’ are drawn upon to build social legitimacy for beliefs and actions that are at the same time highly idiosyncratic, individualistic or self-serving.\(^{32}\) Radical positivism and scientism are the flipside of radical mysticism and subjectivism.
The third myth referred to by Hughes, “the myth of the Christian Nation”, was a by-product of the Second Great Awakening and emerged in the [late eighteenth-century] early national period.33 “At its best”, he writes, this myth “summoned Americans to embrace behaviour in keeping with the teachings of Jesus”.34 Ironically, however, “this myth married itself rather quickly to the myth of the Chosen People and the myth of Nature’s Nation. In this way, Americans absolutised this myth and the notion of a Christian Nation became a badge of cultural superiority, not an incentive to extend compassion to the poor and the oppressed”.35 “The fourth myth”, states Hughes, “the myth of the Millennial Nation, also emerged in the early national period”.36 “Struck with the wonders of the American system of government, and especially with the newness of American freedoms”, he explains, “many believed that the United States would usher in a millennial age of freedom that would eventually bless all the peoples of the earth”.37 But again “Americans have often absolutised this myth”.38 Accordingly, “Americans have sometimes been willing to force others to be free, as was the case with the Philippines in the Spanish-American War. More often, Americans imagined they would liberate the world through the sheer force of their example”.39

“The practice of (American) capitalism”, states Crunden, “emerged under the domination of puritan religious values and business long had religious sanction in ways that few European countries could or wanted to duplicate”.40 Laissez-faire capitalism, writes Hughes, flourished in the United States after the American civil war.41 From this time American capitalism was in Hughes’ terms “a doctrine grounded in the absolutised form of earlier national myths”.42 “Americans of the late nineteenth century”, he explains, “began to promote capitalism, self-interest, and greed as fundamentally natural, as inherently Christian, as the handmaid to American chosenness, and as the presupposition for the dawn of the final golden age”.43 He summarises later:

In the late nineteenth century, capitalism became shrouded in myth and linked to other mythical dimensions of American culture. First, Americans imagined capitalism ordained of God and grounded squarely in the natural order of things. Second, because of their virtue, God had chosen some to succeed on the capitalist playing field, and because of their sinfulness, he had chosen others to fail. Third, because they were fit, nature had decreed that some would survive in the context of capitalist competition, and because they were ‘weak and listless’, as William Lawrence put it, nature had decreed that others would simply die away. Finally, fidelity to the
principle of competition that stood at the heart of the capitalist system would usher in the final golden age and bring peace on earth, good will to men.\textsuperscript{44}

Hughes goes on to say: “This constellation of myths provided privileged and wealthy Americans of the late nineteenth century a virtual mandate to extend their power not only throughout the lands that belonged to the United States, but also throughout the world”.\textsuperscript{45} “If God had singled out America as his chosen instrument among all the nations of the earth”, Hughes relates, “then America had every right to engage in economic expansion. If God blessed the righteous with wealth and cursed sinners with poverty, then it stood to reason that God required economic expansion”.\textsuperscript{46} Moreover, “if capitalism was rooted in the natural order of things, then American economic expansion partook of the natural order as well”.\textsuperscript{47} And “if America was a Christian nation, then the work of economic expansion was an act of Christian charity”.\textsuperscript{48} Finally, “if part of the American mission was to hasten the redemption of the world and the final golden age, then economic expansion was, in all likelihood, a significant part of the redemptive process”.\textsuperscript{49}

This particular capitalist culture, Hughes notes, remains in place in the US today, “providing ‘moral’ justification for the [radically individualist, amoral] behaviours that led to [the 2002 US corporate] scandals”.\textsuperscript{50} “To be sure”, writes Hughes, “few would argue that God has chosen some for wealth and others for poverty and deprivation”.\textsuperscript{51} But, he states, “this is only because the doctrine of ‘divine chosenness’ has been largely secularised. In the place of God, nature reigns supreme in modern America, and most Americans would find little with which to quibble in either the so-called law of competition or the doctrine of the survival of the fittest”.\textsuperscript{52} By the same token:

Few today would agree with Russell Conwell that ‘the men who get rich may be the most honest men you find in the community’. Americans have seen far too much corruption to subscribe to that proposition. But a great many privileged Americans would agree in principle with Henry Ward Beecher’s dictum that ‘no man in this land suffers from poverty unless it be more than his fault – unless it be his sin’.\textsuperscript{53}

“Likewise”, says Hughes, “many Americans find axiomatic the proposition that the creation of free markets around the globe and the expanded production of wealth and material possessions will eventually launch a golden age that will bless the world”.\textsuperscript{54}
“Americans since the late nineteenth century”, he points out, “have defined the very meaning of life in terms of monetary success and the accumulation of goods”.55

In cultural terms then, the dominant strands of American culture are ultimately grounded in the religious beliefs of the English Puritans who established settlements at Plymouth in 1620, and Massachusetts Bay in 1630.56 As Crunden asserts in his history of American culture: “The essential characteristics of American economic behaviour and artistic endeavour stem from (Puritan) origins”.57 “Often challenged”, he writes, these Puritan traditions of thought and behaviour “proved capable of overpowering alternative ways of expression to set a cultural tone accepted in most quarters as ‘American’ until well into the twentieth century”.58

The Puritans believed that all human beings were innately selfish and self-serving and that it was the responsibility of the individual to fight against these submerged bestial tendencies, or drives. As Crunden puts it, “not even Sigmund Freud believed more firmly in the Id than the Puritans did”.59 Left to their ‘natural’ devices, the Puritans believed, individuals would ‘optimise’ their own material rewards at the expense of others. ‘Founding father’ John Winthrop writes in 1639, for example: “the habit of covetousness ... is in every man in some degree”.60

Starting from this view of human nature, it is not surprising that the Puritans placed little faith in subjective human reason as a means of personal or social amelioration, and were accordingly concerned to place strict limits on the powers of government. For the Puritans, as Crunden explains, “uncontrollable drives motivated people and governments, and the goal of their political science was to channel these drives so that they did the least harm to society. The striving for power corrupted the best men and turned them into tyrants once they attained public office”.61 Similarly, in Henry Commager’s account, “as the Fathers of the Revolution read history”, in the late eighteenth century, “it taught one grand and solemn lesson: that all government tends to tyranny, that no government is to be trusted, and that government is best that governs least”.62 “A wise and frugal government”, suggested Thomas Jefferson in his inaugural presidential address, “shall restrain men from injuring one another, shall leave them otherwise free to regulate their own pursuits of industry and improvement, and shall not take from the mouth of labour the bread it has earned”.63
The dominant American attitude to the role of government has been further strengthened by the internal and external dynamics of US history. In Commager’s estimation, “the Jeffersonian faith in the ability of the individual to fend for himself [sic] and the Jeffersonian fear of government ... were based upon realities[,] upon historical experience”. 64 Where “the English economy in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries ... was one in many respects closely controlled by the state”, he writes, “the New World environment ... was not favourable to the maintenance of rigid controls, and there were many who ... revolted against them”. 65 “Many Americans”, states Crunden, “had come to America to escape the religious and class antagonisms of Europe and the settlers were always suspicious of governments”. 66 Governments “seemed to act in mysterious ways to deprive citizens of their liberty”. 67 “Such an attitude”, he says, “lies at the root of the long-standing American hostility to European social democracy in the twentieth century”. 68 “Americans”, he explains further, “disliked the corrupt, nepotistic relationship between the British government and capitalism, most obviously the East India Tea Company (and) the nation that resulted retained this hostility to government-assisted business ventures in ways that contrast strikingly with modern attitudes in Japan or Germany”; 69 or, it could have been added until at least the last two decades, Australia. 70 The “emphasis on private group action remained a deep strain in American psychology”, Crunden also suggests, in part because the “Americans managed the revolution through private, ad hoc organizations”. 71 As a result, importantly:

Unlike the British system, where the various branches of government represented separate social interests, the American system evolved in such a way as to have the president, the senate, and the judiciary, as well as the house, all represent the people. Each may check the power of the other, but each represents ‘the people’, and not a special class or interest group in society. 72

The proper relationship between the individual and government is imagined as a ‘pure’ one.

The characteristically American degree of faith in free markets is obviously linked to the traditional distrust of government regulation, but is also grounded in the Puritan notion of the individual and national ‘covenant’ with God, through which it could be argued that social outcomes were signs of God’s will. 73 Also important here is the
strength of American Deist religion during the mid- to late-eighteenth century revolutionary period, beliefs which foregrounded the idea of ‘nature’ as the true ‘book’ of God’s will and thus implied that overt regulation of social activity should be minimised. A further factor is the idealisation of the ‘rugged’ pioneering individual. And there is the profound impact within America of Herbert Spencer’s mid- and late-nineteenth century social Darwinism; an impact strengthened, especially after the American Civil War, by the nation’s radically stratified class structure, the energetic propagation of social Darwinist doctrines by leading industrialists, statesmen and jurists, and by a more general American idealisation of science and technology, strengthened by both the Puritan distrust of subjective human interpretation and the evident industrial and military power lent to the United States by its technological advancement.

Accordingly, intellectuals of the predominantly American New Right movement repeatedly contended that, because of its grounding in positivist science, their analysis was inherently superior to the normative and evaluative forms of analysis based on the Keynesian understanding of economics and public policy as parts of social science. This claim was made in popular forums such as the Australian Financial Review as well within the university. New Right public-policy advocacy notably ignored evidence contradicting its claims, as well as alternative public-policy frameworks, and was characterised by the propagation of essentialised, a-social and a-historical ‘truths’, such as the claims that wealth and poverty have primarily biological or psychological bases. New Right intellectuals argued that a free-market society would reward hard work, rugged individualism, against the grafting hands of the weak, protected and symbolised by the welfare state. At the same time they relentlessly criticised welfare recipients, public sector workers and unionists as lazy, inefficient and dishonest. In institutionalising both greed and need, individual material incentive, the New Right directly promoted radical individualism. Underpinning this scientism, subjectivism and individualism has been the characteristic American puritan rhetoric, and set of ontological assumptions, in which the inherently ‘fallen’ nature of humanity can be overcome by faith in and acceptance of the laws of nature, especially as these are revealed by (natural) science.
Neo-classical Liberalism and the Americanisation of Australian Culture 1: A Review of the Literature

It has already been noted that the most direct sources of Australian neo-classical liberalism were American individuals, organisations, institutions and finance. And it has been argued that neo-classical liberalism is strongly underpinned by dominant strands of American culture, a culture characterised by a radical individualism with its roots in Puritanism, and, via an idealisation of ‘nature’, both radical scientism and its flipside: radical mysticism or subjectivism. In the postwar period, especially, Australian culture began to be strongly influenced by, or to take on the appearance of, these traditionally American characteristics.  

The nature and extent of this Americanisation will be considered later in the chapter. Firstly, however, it is necessary to address the question of why scholars of neo-classical liberalism, of Whitlam and the Whitlam period, and of Australian politics and history more generally, have not given extensive consideration to the possibility that the rise to dominance of neo-classical liberalism within Australia might be an expression of the Americanisation of Australian culture.

Bruce Bennett has asked if “few serious analyses of North American influences (on Australian education, culture and society) have been attempted ... because, like the British influences which they in many cases superseded, they were so pervasive”? There is in any case a general lack of research on Australian right-wing political philosophies and groups. It is clear, however, that existing historical accounts of the shift from Whitlamite welfare-state to neo-classical liberal public policy tend to begin from an overly narrow conception of culture and so fail to properly analyse the cultural dimensions of this development in public policy. Existing accounts either suggest that the dominance of neo-classical liberalism is an expression of the contemporary dominance of scientific or instrumental rationalism over normative truth and cultural considerations (thereby ignoring the extent to which this scientific and instrumental rationality is culturally specific), or exclude questions of culture altogether, or conclude that neo-liberal public policy and philosophy, like and in the same way as all other phenomena, are cultural, and that it is therefore not meaningful to talk about this policy and philosophy in terms of cultural dominance and subservience: power. These approaches
broadly correspond with the philosophies of liberal humanism, conservatism and postmodernism. As Terry Eagleton has argued, “we are trapped at the moment between disablingly wide and discomfortingly rigid notions of culture”.89 “Our most urgent need in the area”, he suggests, “is to move beyond both”.90

The most detailed and sophisticated account of the rise of neo-classical liberalism within Australia remains Michael Pusey’s 1991 Economic Rationalism in Canberra: A Nation-Building State Changes Its Mind.91 In this text Pusey takes note of the American intellectual and institutional sources of Australian neo-classical liberalism and points out that the philosophy and experience underpinning this new public policy is at odds with those traditionally dominant within Australia. “In every country from the late 1970s”, he writes (the reference to ‘every country’ perhaps overstating his case), “programs of state and public sector reform have been driven by a conservative agenda”.92 He sees this agenda as informed by “an underlying scientism that seems to turn arbitrariness into givenness and imperiously asserts its own exclusive evaluative criteria for what will, in the wake of its ‘reforms’, count as intelligence, ability, and efficacy”.93 “What wins”, he says, is a kind of ‘dephenomenalising’ abstraction that tries to neutralise the social contexts of program goals in every area, whether it be education, industry support, public health, or water resource management”.94 As a result of this, “a new generation of ‘strategic visionaries’ have taken charge of a vigorous program of public sector reform. Within ‘the system’, their ‘mission’ has been to ‘demoralise’ the public sector and so to produce in Canberra, purposely or not, that ‘sickness in the soul of the public administrator’ that now afflicts their American counterparts”.95 “There is cause to ask”, he says, “whether the institutions of a supposedly ‘strong’ and nation-building state were really the borrowed cladding of a vanishing colonial inheritance that has (especially with the relative decline of Britain and its integration within the EEC) left Australia exposed to a recolonisation in the alien framework of a totalitarian American ‘business democracy’”.96

In his later study of the social effects of neo-classical liberal economic ‘reform’, The Experience of Middle Australia, Pusey also draws attention to the fact that neo-classical liberalism was “sold” to governments by (predominantly American) business groups as a solution to political, not economic, social problems.97 However, Pusey
cannot see neo-classical liberalism as in any sense an expression of American culture, or indeed, of any culture, because for Pusey neo-classical liberalism is a form of public policy that results from a more pervasive intellectual attempt to comprehend and organise society on the basis of the natural, or positivist, scientific method, and he conceives of this scientism precisely as culture’s opposite, or other: “The triumph of economic rationalism points to a weakness of culture and civil society”.98 “Perhaps the most central finding”, says Pusey, is that, since the 1970s, reality has been turned upside down and society has been recast as the object of politics (rather than, at least in the norms of the earlier discourses), as the subject of politics”.99 “Societies”, he concludes, “are threatened by their own coordinative structures and, most notably now, by an economic steering mechanism which violates the adaptive capacities of ordinary social life and threatens the social reproduction of culture and individual identity”.100

“All that is solid melts into air”, wrote Marx in the Communist Manifesto, referring in part to capitalism’s tendency to crush cultural tradition, and Pusey sees capitalism in comparable terms as existing in a zero-sum oppositional relationship with culture, defined as ‘traditional’ society. For Pusey culture is that which is not scientific: culture is ‘tradition’ – pre-modern, non-rational, communal – that ‘whole way of life’ that is studied within anthropology, especially. Capitalism, on the other hand, is essentially a product of science, and neo-classical liberalism or economic rationalism is a product of positivist science. This is why Pusey prefers ‘economic rationalism’ to ‘neo-classical liberalism’ or ‘neo-liberalism’: his chosen term suggests his view that the adoption of this policy represents a new degree of dominance by a more pervasive and older positivist philosophy. Influenced by the German historicist philosophical strand of Weber and Jürgen Habermas, especially, which can be traced back to Immanuel Kant, Pusey is most vitally concerned with rejecting the view that positivist science can provide useful models for the wholesale organisation and government of society.101 Accordingly, he sees the historical conflict between Whitlam’s Keynesian welfare-state public-policy model and the neo-classical liberal model of the New Right as a conflict between cultured ways of knowing and acting, based on normative truth, on the one hand, and modes of thought and action based on empirical truth, or positivist science, on the other. His central argument is that within the governments of “Anglo-American capitalism”,
mathematically measurable forms of knowledge have, disastrously, come to dominate over normative truths, based on shared experiences and values, in the setting of policy: “The first assumption of this economic rationalism is that the ‘economy ... obeys not an immanent logic of needs, but instead the need for an immanent logic’ ... The state apparatus takes on a form of rationalisation which looks more like aggressive nihilism than reason and which seems to endanger the reproduction of society itself”.

Pusey ignores the extent to which neo-classical liberalism and positivist scientism are rooted in American culture – in Americans’ imagined experience of nature – and does not consider the possibility that the spread of American culture within Australia may have helped to prepare the way for Australians’ acceptance of these developments, because in Pusey’s account neo-classical liberalism or economic rationalism precisely is an expression of the subordination of culture to positivist science, which by definition has no cultural origins. Inevitably the proponents of this new policy framework appear in his account as simply morally bad and / or intellectually narrow, while the ordinary people who experience the personal and social effects of this policy framework can only appear to be either stupid (where they accept these changes) or mere victims. The cultural dimensions of this broad-based social change are collapsed into its intellectual and political dimensions because Pusey begins from an overly narrow conception of ‘culture’, an overly rigid distinction between culture and science.

‘Culture’ is an extraordinarily contested term, valued by both the political Right (who generally see it as a means of binding people together across class, gender and other structural social barriers) and the Left (who see in its communal nature a basis for collective opposition to holders of political, economic and cultural power). As Raymond Williams, one of the most often cited authorities on the subject, explains, the complicated meaning of ‘culture’ ensues “partly because of its intricate historical development, in several European languages, but mainly because it has now come to be used for important concepts in several distinct intellectual disciplines and in several distinct and incompatible systems of thought”. However, in contemporary usage, and leaving aside references to physical culture within various branches of the sciences, the uses of ‘culture’ operate in three broad categories, drawing on three core meanings of the word.
The oldest still existing core meaning is that of culture as a synonym for civilisation. To be cultured is to be *cultivated*, civilised. As an independent noun, culture arrived in English from the French during the mid-eighteenth century. Culture had previously been a noun of process, as Williams explains: “the culture (cultivation) of crops or (rearing and breeding) of animals, and by extension the culture (active cultivation) of the human mind”.\(^\text{105}\) The immediate precursor to ‘culture’ was the Latin ‘culta’, which according to Williams meant “cultivation or tending, though with subsidiary medieval meanings of honour and worship”.\(^\text{106}\) As Eagleton notes, taking cognisance of the Latin rootword of ‘culture’ and ‘culpta’: ‘colere’, culture has its roots in nature: “The cultural means we use to transform nature are themselves derived from it”.\(^\text{107}\) Chris Jenks adds that from the time of its first appearance in English until the late eighteenth century, the word ‘culture’ existed in primary semantic opposition to ‘nature’.\(^\text{108}\) It was the freedom from labour, enabled by cultivation of the earth, that enabled the social and psychological development that would be labelled culture. Here, writes Eagleton, “‘culture’ belonged to the general spirit of the Enlightenment, with its cult of secular, progressive self-development”.\(^\text{109}\) This was the case, Williams suggests, “first in the abstract sense of a general process of becoming ‘civilised’ or ‘cultivated’; second, in the sense which had already been established for *civilisation* by the historians of the Enlightenment, in the popular (eighteenth century) form of the universal histories, as a description of the secular process of human development”.\(^\text{110}\) Culture here involves the development of the universally finest human qualities. Importantly, within this usage of culture, there is no distinction drawn between cultural and scientific development. As a result, the notion of culture as a synonym for civilisation, for the intellectual and social activities that sustain the society or societies that are included within the civilisation definition, in practice necessarily involves the subjugation of the cultural (as it came to be understood later) to the scientific.

A second core meaning of ‘culture’ derives from a late eighteenth-century German (and to a lesser extent English) dissatisfaction with the unitary logic and universalist humanism of the primarily French notion of culture as civilisation. The equation of culturedness with a society’s degree of cultivation or civilisation can be seen as elitist and Eurocentric. As Eagleton writes, “it is with the unfolding of nineteenth-
century colonialism” that the second, “anthropological meaning” of culture, “as a unique way of life, first starts to take grip”.

‘Culture’, Williams writes, now becomes “a noun of configuration or generalisation of the ‘spirit’ which informed the ‘whole way of life’ of a distinct people”.

A key figure in the development of this new sense of the meaning of ‘culture’ is Johann Herder, who according to Williams “first used the significant plural, ‘cultures’, in deliberate distinction from any singular or, as we would now say, unilinear sense of ‘civilisation’.

Herder also wrote of culture, in his Ideas on the Philosophy of the History of Mankind (1784–91): “nothing is more indeterminate than this word, and nothing more deceptive than its application to all nations and periods”.

This sense of culture, which according to Williams “remained comparatively isolated” until at least the mid–nineteenth century, is in one sense more inclusive, but in another more specialised and exclusive. As Eagleton explains: “whereas the French ‘civilisation’ typically included political, economic and technical life, the German ‘culture’ had a more narrowly religious, artistic and intellectual reference. It could also mean the intellectual refinement of a group or individual, rather than of society as a whole”.

This second sense of culture informs the growth of the disciplines of anthropology and sociology. The meaning of culture here begins to shift from being synonymous with, to the antonym of ‘civilisation’, as though in its embracing of rationality, civilisation had become antithetical to the more ‘natural’ feelings and practices of common people, who live according to tradition. Idealist philosophers in Germany and Romantic artists in Germany and Britain embraced this concept of culture – as an environmentally organic ‘whole way of life’ – as an expression of their antipathy toward the alienating, exploitative, environmentally ‘inorganic’ and politically imperialist social structure of capitalism. Initially this was expressed in an interest in folk culture and medievalism, and in a general antipathy to technology, mechanisation and the machine, clearly evident in the poetry of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, Blake, Byron and in the work of most of their Romantic artistic contemporaries. From the time of the Idealist philosophers and the Romantic artists, according to Jenks, ‘culture’ ceases to exist in primary semantic opposition to ‘nature’ and begins to exist in primary opposition to ‘the machine’.

By the end of the nineteenth century, Eagleton concludes, ‘culture’ had
become “the name of the Romantic, pre-Marxist critique of early industrial capitalism”.  

Culture, within this second meaning, is less idealised, in the sense that it refers to a way of life as it is lived rather than to a rationalist ideal based on scientific principles. But culture here is also more idealised in the sense that the spirit or sensibility of a people who share a whole way of life is necessarily held to be generally independent from the political, economic, scientific and technological structures and processes that characterise that life style. In Eagleton’s account: “As the modern age unfolded ... culture became a rather toothless form of political critique, or it was the protected area into which one could siphon off all those potentially disruptive energies, spiritual, artistic or erotic, for which modernity could make less and less provision”.

A third meaning of ‘culture’, dating to the late nineteenth century, refers to the set of objects and practices that are held to define the spirit or sensibility of the society as a whole (when culture is understood in terms of its second meaning) or the civilisation (when culture is understood in terms of its first meaning). Here, ‘culture’ refers to the arts and learning. To the extent that the arts and humanities, within this context, are generally privileged as more cultural than the social and physical sciences, the second core meaning of culture could be said to dominate within this category. However, the very notion that a set of cultural objects and practices could encapsulate the spirit or sensibility of the culture of society as a whole can be seen to be based on the Enlightenment notions dominant within the first core meaning of culture. As Williams writes, this third use “is in origin an applied form of sense (i): the idea of a general process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development was applied and effectively transferred to the works and practices which represent and sustain it. In English (i) and (iii) are still close”. It is within this third core meaning of culture, then, that the ongoing tensions between the two earlier core meanings of culture, deriving respectively from or alongside the Enlightenment and Romanticism, are most fully evident.

Pusey, like most liberal-humanist thinkers, basically defines culture in terms of its second meaning. (It is no coincidence that this is the meaning that derives from German Idealist philosophers like Kant, by whom Pusey is much influenced.) But as Williams argues, it is an intellectual error to begin from any narrow definition of culture, since the
inevitable result will be an unsatisfactorily reductive interpretation of the complex relations between culture and society. “The complex of senses”, states Williams, “indicates a complex argument about the relations between general human development and a particular way of life, and between both and the works and practices of art and intelligence”. He goes on to contend that “these arguments and questions cannot be resolved by reducing the complexity of actual usage”, because the complexity “is not finally in the word but in the problems which its variations of use significantly indicate”. That is to say, the different substantial meanings of culture cannot be conflated, because the differences derive from the complex nature of human relations with the world and each other. In one sense, then, culture does include more or less everything; while it also has narrower and more precise meanings. No single definition is completely satisfactory, but it can be said that it is an intellectual error, or unjustifiable conflation of complex reality, to try to suggest a radical separateness of these different dimensions of culture, or to try to conflate the differences between them, reducing questions of culture to questions of science, or nature to culture, and so on.

In contrast to Pusey, David Kemp draws exclusively on the first and oldest meaning of culture – culture as a synonym for civilisation – in his account of the rise of neo-classical liberalism in Australia. Kemp’s ‘Liberalism and Conservatism in Australia Since 1944’ is the most substantial New Right account of this history and in drawing on the first meaning of culture is broadly representative of the politically conservative approach to cultural analysis. Starting like Pusey from a narrow definition of culture, the resultant historical narrative is similarly (and perhaps even more predictably) inadequate. In this article Kemp states that:

The increasing influence of [neo-classical] liberal thought was based principally on two factors: (a) the growing role of analysis in the policy process and on the analytical strength of liberal social science; and (b) the growing insecurity of Australia’s international economic position, which liberal intellectuals identified as a consequence of the excessive pursuit in the past of short-term security through government regulation at the expense of flexibility and adaptability to change.

So for Kemp the rise of neo-classical liberalism stemmed from the analytic or rational strength of neo-classical liberal policy analysis in recognising and comprehending the
objective material conditions facing the nation and the world, within a context in which rational analysis was being granted a greater role in directing public policy. Neither political power nor, it would seem, culture, play any significant role within this historical development.

This is not quite true, however, for Kemp needs to explain why neo-classical liberalism emerged in some parts of the world and not others. Accordingly, he goes on to say: “The influence of [neo-classical] liberal thought was based in turn on two features of Australian culture that were shared with the rest of Western civilisation: rationalism and individualism”. 127 Only within the narrow understanding of culture as civilisation, in which no distinction is drawn between culture, science and the social structure, could rationalism and individualism be held to be aspects of culture. Within the second and third core meanings of culture these things are more likely to be seen as the antitheses of culture. The notion of a ‘culture’ of rationalism and individualism is further undermined by Kemp’s next proposition, that “The foundation of the continuing interest in liberal thought is to be found in a basic characteristic of the human condition: people have purposes and wish to realise them”. 128 Thus, while the notion of an Australian and Western culture of rationalism and individualism suggests a democratic basis for the policy direction provided by neo-classical liberal intellectuals, the real origins of these beliefs and systems of thought, and presumably of the political power of Western ‘civilisation’, are found in ‘a basic characteristic of the human condition’, in nature. Australian and Western culture then is supposedly distinguished by its members’ acceptance of rationalism and individualism as essentially natural. While culture is rarely mentioned directly in other right-wing and journalistic histories of and references to Whitlam and the rise of neo-classical liberalism, this notion of Australian society as a civilisation, a product of a culture of rational individualism, informs their writing. Recent Australian history is thus similarly understood as ultimately a rational expression of the natural behaviour of individuals.

The most extensive consideration of the cultural bases of Australian liberalism is Judith Brett’s *Australian Liberalism and the Moral Middle Class*. 129 Brett understandably contends that cultural factors have not been given the attention they deserve in accounts of the motivations of Australian Liberal and conservative politicians and their supporters.
“This book”, she writes, “goes back to Deakin, Bruce and Lyons to explore the origins of Menzies’ mid-century construction of the political world, and forward to Fraser and Howard to see what became of it”. She takes as her primary material “the words of those who subscribed” to the Liberal tradition – qualitative rather than quantitative evidence – and finds deep connections between these statements by Liberal leaders and intellectuals and key strains of Australian culture, particularly those emanating from Protestantism. Throughout, Brett emphasises the agency of middle- and working-class Liberal voters and the positive, active reasons for their voting choice, in contrast to class-based interpretations which point to the Party’s persistent inducement of and capitalisation on ignorance, prejudice and fear.

Brett convincingly identifies the origins of Australian liberalism prior to the dominance of its neo-classical form in broadly puritanical British Protestantism: “The British Liberalism on which the Australian Liberals drew”, she writes, “had a Protestant history”. Menzies, she notes:

was born in 1894 when Queen Victoria was on the throne, in what he later described as ‘the outer empire’, and grew up during the resurgence of British imperial fervour before World War One. Britain was the centre of his world, the source of the power, the wealth and the people that had established white society in Australia and of the institutions, values, and ideas on which it had been built.

British-Australian Protestant liberalism was philosophically individualist: “Deakin’s definition of a man” for example “had its tap root deep in the complex intertwined history of liberalism and Protestantism[,] in which the Protestant reformation’s fight for freedom of religious conviction paved the way for its secularisation in liberalism’s independence of political judgement”. It was therefore opposed to and intolerant of sectional or group identities and to explanations of reality in structural terms: “The underlying logic of Protestant liberalism”, states Brett, “with its emphasis on the virtues of free-thinking, independent men[,] makes it impossible to recognise group-based identities as legitimate”, and “the fundamental position of individual choice and moral agency in the Protestant imagination makes it pre-sociological in a way the Catholic imagination is not”. Physical, as opposed to verbal, protest, was regarded here as deeply uncivilised. A strict opposition was drawn between ‘ideology’, which was loathed, and
the much prized ‘reason’.\textsuperscript{138} Honesty, thought of in the Cromwellian sense of telling the ‘plain truth’, was an especially treasured virtue.\textsuperscript{139}

But this individualism was notably tempered by an emphasis on personal sacrifice and the importance of fulfilment of duty, as the proper bases of good citizenship and thus of the moral health of society, upon which prosperity was assumed to ultimately wrest. “Duty, sacrifice and service”, Brett finds for example, “were the major themes in the advertising for [First World War] war bonds”.\textsuperscript{140} Similarly, Prime Minister Joseph Lyons’ resignation from Labor, Brett suggests, “made him the Australian Liberals’ ideal representative, appealing to his conscience in defiance of the dictates of his party, putting the representative processes of parliament and the good of the nation above the claims of the party, acting from a sense of service and duty, rather than ambition and self-interest”.\textsuperscript{141}

This British-Australian Protestant liberalism placed great moral emphasis on ‘sound finance’, understood during the interwar years in terms of balanced budgets and a refusal to over-consume or rely on borrowed money: “The issues of financial morality in the 1930s had deep psychological roots in the belief that the stability of the nation’s financial system was ultimately grounded in stability of character”.\textsuperscript{142} “The commonsense link was established in people’s minds”, writes Brett, “between the managing of the household and the national economies”.\textsuperscript{143} But the general emphasis on the individual’s duty to society and the absence of a Deist fetishisation of nature meant that there was not a wholesale acceptance of free market relations as an essentially natural expression of God’s will, as was the case in the US. Hence in the interwar period, “the growing understanding of the interdependence of the national economy was accompanied by the widespread belief that the pain necessary to restore its health must be shared”.\textsuperscript{144} Part of Lyons’ appeal was in the example of restraint that he set,\textsuperscript{145} Brett argues, and she also contends that the conservative United Australia Party – the immediate precursor to the Australian Liberal Party – lost its way in the late 1930s in part because “its financial backers [were] more obvious than ever”.\textsuperscript{146} “For most of the century, certainly until the 1970s”, Brett concludes, “Australian Liberals’ commitment to individual freedom was contained and limited by widely shared understandings of the basis of Australia’s social unity. Race, crown and nation all provided plausible
representations of what Australians shared, and an ethic of service balanced talk of rights with that of duty and obligation.”

It is not at all clear that, as Brett imagines, her culturalist interpretations invalidate the materialist insights of preceding historical accounts. The trouble with focusing on and taking at face value the statements of Liberals or any other group is that deliberately obfuscatory and unconscious (properly ideological) motivations cannot then be taken into account. There is no reason why conflicting culturalist and materialist interpretations cannot both be correct at the same time. If Deakin’s ‘Liberals’ were so unwilling to be morally compromised, for example, why did they side with their erstwhile enemies, the free-trade anti-socialists, at the time of the ‘fusion’ of liberal and conservative parties in Australia, rather than maintain their independence? Obviously, the price of such independence, electoral failure, was for class reasons deemed too high.

More importantly, however, because she sees neo-classical liberalism (or ‘neo-liberalism’, as she prefers) as an expression of scientistic logic, and like Pusey thinks of culture and science as existing in radical opposition to each other, she does not situate the rise of neo-classical liberalism within the cultural terms she has mapped out in her study. Though she has noted connections between Australian and British Protestantism and liberalism throughout her study, Brett does not go on to note connections between Australian and American Puritanism and neo-classical liberalism, or suggest the possibility that neo-classical liberalism may have its cultural origins in a peculiarly American, individualist, scientistic and subjectivist application of Puritanism.

With the appearance of Fraser and neo-classical liberalism in Brett’s narrative, cultural factors are nowhere to be seen. Neo-classical liberalism is instead understood as an essentially rational response to a vaguely imagined ‘postmodernity’:

The world economy had changed, as the end of the long boom gave way to a new phase of economic globalisation ... Fraser wanted to strengthen the market economy, but his market was still essentially a market of goods, tangible products like bales of wool, machines, clothes and iron ore, not the fast growing postmodern market of services, images, experiences and intellectual property.

Although Brett argues that neo-classical liberalism is imposed from above – by political leaders, bureaucrats, journalists and so on – she also argues, somewhat
contradictorily, that this set of policy is a response to an historically inevitable breakdown or dispersal of community and to the end of socio-economic class as a popular basis of identity. Thus, while she sees neo-classical liberalism as imposed by a certain group in society – a class? – she also argues that this form of policy is, somehow naturally, the policy of the historical moment. “This [neo-classical liberal] transformation”, writes Brett, “was the result, not of pressures from below, of groups and interests working through the party system to influence government policy, but of an elite conversion to the belief that the Australian economy had to be restructured, whether the Australian people liked it or not”.\footnote{151} But:

By 1996 ... class understandings no longer framed people’s day-to-day lives nor their understandings of political action and possibilities. The spread of suburbia and increased levels of home ownership, the increased mobility given by the motorcar, the general increase in living standards, and spread of consumerist, home-centred lifestyles ... had made the politics of class difference seem largely irrelevant.\footnote{152}

“The decline of class-based explanations”, she concludes, “left the way clear for social explanations based on individuals’ qualities and actions”.\footnote{153}

Where Brett has earlier, like Pusey, configured culture in terms of its second meaning, as being broadly opposed to the scientific and the ‘modern’, she now equates culture with its third meaning: culture as the arts and learning. That is to say, she confuses postmodernity, an arbitrarily defined historical period, with postmodernism, a philosophy which in many of its manifestations emphasises the textual nature of all reality, and so also both the capacity of the individual, or the ‘reader’, to ‘construct’ her own reality, and the absence of material centres of genuine power. In so doing Brett effectively loses the ability to differentiate between the world and representations of it. Here, neo-classical liberalism is cultural, but only in the sense that everything is cultural.

This postmodernist relativism, with its origins in Romanticism and Hegelian Idealism,\footnote{154} is articulated more extensively in Lindsay Barrett’s The Prime Minister’s Christmas Card: Blue Poles and Cultural Politics in the Whitlam Era.\footnote{155} Barrett argues that the era of the Whitlam government is best understood as ‘modern’, and as definitively marking off the modern from our own postmodern age. But while the profound nature of this social change may be beyond question, what Barrett means by
‘modern’ and ‘postmodern’ and his understanding of the bases and nature of this historical shift, are not. For Barrett, all thought, from the creative to the analytic, is an expression of the epoch in which one exists, of the regimes of truth, in Foucault’s terms, that dominate during that epoch. Accordingly, no individual or group can be seen to be capable of influencing the course of history or the historical conditions in which they live. In this text Barrett identifies many different cultural and material factors involved in this shift from Whitlamism to neo-classical liberalism, modernity to postmodernity, but eschews any suggestion that any particular factors were more important than others in bringing this general historical shift about. Indeed, it is the very indeterminacy of the causes of this historical movement that serve for Barrett as evidence of its depth, profundity and inevitability.

Beginning as Barrett does from this conceptual framework, the conclusions that he reaches are foregone ones: the Whitlam government was both an expression of its modernist age and doomed for that same reason; there was nothing that anybody or group, on either side of the political fence, could have done to halt or significantly shape what was a (postmodern) tidal wave of history; the society in which we now live may have its problems but is basically an expression of our postmodern consciousness and set of circumstances and cannot be significantly changed. Significantly, Barrett names his chapter examining the economic crises confronting the Whitlam government and the process by which monetarist and neo-classical liberal means of dealing with these crises came to dominance: ‘No Free Lunch’; the famous maxim of Milton Friedman. Barrett is effectively left with no option but to conclude that the dominance of neo-classical liberal public policy in the postmodern era is simply an expression of this new age, just as Whitlamism was apparently an expression of modernity, because his whole argument wrests on the contention that the arrival of postmodernity was inevitable: “The global experience of modernity made Whitlamism feasible as a coherent arrangement of socio-political statements, actions and possibilities. At the same time, inevitably perhaps, the decline of modernity led directly to Whitlamism’s decline”.

In order to arrive at this conclusion, Barrett is like Brett forced to accept the dominance of neo-classical liberalism on its proponents’ own terms, as the logical or inevitable outcome of their own superior handling of a natural, rather than a social
There is no consideration of the relationship between neo-liberal analysis and the political ideology connected to and informing it, let alone of its specific cultural origins, though the general American origins are noted. Barrett is completely uncritical towards neo-classical liberal sources of economic thought, such as the Australian Financial Review, Max Walsh, Laurie Oakes, P.P. McGuinness, Treasury and even Friedman. There is no mention of the neo-Keynesian and socialist economic alternatives to economic rationalism that existed at the time and were extended later. Economic planning is supposedly outdated because the world has ‘fragmented’, but there is no acknowledgment of global economic trends towards corporate conglomeration and monopoly and massive and rapidly increasing inequity. These conditions, predicted and focused upon by intellectuals influenced by Marx and Keynes, are definitively characteristic of ‘postmodern’ capitalism but fly in the face of free-market dogma and postmodernist delusions about the current dispersal of agency and power. Nowhere is the possibility considered that, if neo-classical liberalism is a product of its age, the age may also be considered a product of neo-classical liberalism.

Barrett’s final chapter advances his contention that the dominant policy framework is the only possible contemporary model of government. Referring to 1995 speeches by former Whitlam Government ministers Bill Hayden and Paul Keating, Barrett summarises:

The statements by Keating and Hayden on the illusory nature of a Labourist utopia are of the greatest relevance precisely because they emphasise the distance between the Australia of the 1990s – the Australia of postmodernity – and the Australia of the 1970s, when it was still possible for many of the political Left to publicly affirm their belief in an ideal like Progress, and maintain their faith in the possibilities of national reform through the management of change.

Barrett seems intent on embodying what E.P. Thompson criticised as “the condescension of posterity”: reducing this political struggle of Whitlam and others against the New Right to a struggle of those clinging to the past against those embracing the future. The Whitlam “project”, writes Barrett, was “doomed from the beginning”.

It has been said of economic rationalism that far from being empirically true, it simply ignores the evidence. The same could be said of relativist postmodernism.
Indeed, an interesting feature of the final two chapters of Barrett’s text is the extent to which they clarify a possible philosophical connection, even synergy, between postmodernism and neo-classical liberalism. Each body of thought tends to ignore the second meaning of culture, downplaying the importance of normative truth, based on communal experience and understanding, and valorises instead a heady mixture of idealism and positivism, based respectively on the third and first meanings of culture. Both relativist or idealist postmodernism and positivist neo-classical liberalism represent the world as operating according to certain natural and supposedly universal laws. Any social claims which contradict these laws can only be seen as subjective and non-rational, outdated or immature. Each of these philosophies constructs a model of reality in which relations of power and domination are expressions of history or reason, rather than the dialectical result of human political and cultural interaction and activity. And in their overt refusal to make value judgements on the basis of culture, to avoid being subjective or ideological in their analyses and prescriptions, each body of thought actively denies its own ideological basis.

Existing accounts of the fate of Whitlam and Whitlamism and the rise of neo-classical liberalism, then, tend to see cultural factors as wholly secondary to either political power or to intellectual change, or alternatively (in the case of relativist postmodernist accounts) assert that this political and intellectual change is actually a sign of a more profoundly cultural, and thereby essentially a-political, development, a shift in spirit or Zeitgeist. A more satisfying account of the rise of neo-classical liberalism requires a greater sensitivity towards the different and at times incommensurate meanings of culture: an historical narrative in which the dialectical relationship between the spiritual and material dimensions of life, between culture and society, is properly recognised.

**Neo-classical Liberalism and the Americanisation of Australian Culture 2: Evidence for the General Argument**

In their 1993 study *Implicated: The United States in Australia*, which remains the major work on the cultural dimensions of Australia’s relationship with the United States, Philip Bell and Roger Bell observe that “when writing about Australia in relation to America,
historians have tended to concentrate on economics and on military and strategic relationships”. Laudably, they aim to rectify this situation: “This book ... examines in detail how cultural relationships have formed the substrata on which the more public and visible connections encoded in treaties and in economic arrangements have been built”. On the basis of their work and that of other scholars in the field, it can be seen that in each of the three major senses of the word, Australian culture was in the period leading up to 1975, the year of the Dismissal and of the rise to dominance of neo-classical liberal public policy, undergoing a general process of Americanisation.

Australia’s economic and cultural relations (and to a lesser extent, its political relations) with the US can be traced to the southern nation’s very early days. In his substantial account of the Australian experience of Americanisation Richard White argues that this cultural impact “was probably most rapid in the years between [the First World] War and the Depression”. However, until the Second World War at least, the dominant Australian civilisation ideal, accepted as such by more or less all of the upper and middle classes and by many of the working-classes also, was that of Britain. Certainly until this time most forms of culture that were consciously produced or consumed as ‘culture’ in Australia were British or British-aligned, while popular forms of cultural entertainment were likely to be American or a local Australian form. Australians saw Britain as the greatest civilisation both in the sense of being the most powerful nation, militarily, and in the sense that it was the home of proper civility and cultural refinement.

During the Second World War America became the world’s most powerful nation militarily, and Australians, having been directly threatened by the Japanese and largely saved by the Americans, were especially conscious of this power. Immediately after the war it became apparent that America was also the world’s most powerful nation economically. And partly because it was the strongest and most wealthy of nations, America from this time came to define ‘the future’. The American way of life and the technologically advanced consumer capitalist rewards it offered (potentially at least to all people) were powerfully attractive. Through its advertising, film, television, magazine and music industries, especially, America promised a life of ease, order and affluence, and ‘access’ – at however distant a remove – to fashionable, glamorous, sexualised
beauty. From the mid-1950s for the first time American ‘high art’ also made inroads into the consumption patterns of “middlebrow” and upper-class Australian social groups, who had previously seen American culture as a threat to proper British-Australian patriotism. Partly this was achieved, as numerous scholars have noted, through the success with which public- and private-sector proponents of the American ‘high art’ industry positioned New York from the 1950s not only as the global centre of art, but as the centre of an art world in which artistic value was measured according to its avant-garde status. The emphasis on being artistically ‘new’ fitted seamlessly with the wider US culture of consumerism and technological advancement, in which aesthetic value could to an ever increasing degree be defined in terms of market value. There was a general absence of aesthetic alternatives offered by the Left, with socialist realism dominating. Finally, the increasing appeal of both ‘low’ and ‘high’ forms of American culture was directly influenced by the pronouncements of the New Right, from the mid-1960s, which valorised the American free-market mode of social organisation and vilified what was seen as the ‘socialist’ model prevailing in Britain. For all of these reasons, in the postwar context the US comprehensively came to replace Britain as the dominant model of civilisation to which Australians looked, and consciously or unconsciously expected their own nation to follow.

In terms of the second core meaning of culture, culture as a spirit or sensibility informing the whole way of life of a particular people, it is of course difficult to generalise confidently about a unilinear ‘national spirit’, and such discussions seem best tackled via a concrete engagement with a community’s or society’s structure of feeling, represented within its art. But it is clearly the case that after the Second World War Australians’ lifestyles and their relationships with each other were profoundly influenced by, and in many cases quite directly reflected, American initiatives. It is also undeniable that Australians’ thoughts and feelings about this process, their understanding of this dimension of Australian culture, were impacted upon by pervasive American political discourses, cultural products and intellectual and artistic traditions and trends. That is to say, these changes in the structure and nature of Australian society were to an extent ‘normalised’ by the diffusion of cultural products emanating from an American
context in which a comparable social model was already experienced as and felt to be ‘natural’.

In the postwar era Australian forms and modes of economic production, industrial relations, social and urban planning and transport were all strongly influenced by the American model. As well as being the nation’s principal source of imports, the American market for Australian primary-product exports increased and new forms of industry, particularly in the service sector, grew up to meet a new demand arising from the Americanisation of existing patterns of work, mobility and consumption. American Fordist ‘scientific’ management of workplace production became the norm. As in America, new technologies were incorporated into the workplace in a way that most benefitted employers and led to large-scale employee redundancies. The growth of the automobile industry, financed by US corporations, especially helped to facilitate the dispersal of industrial production and social life generally. Highways and suburbs proliferated while local communities, previously built around the need of industry for a relatively large, locally-based workforce, took on a much more diffuse and segregated character. Families and in places communities became more sealed off from the broader society. In a profound way, as R.W. Connell argued in 1977, these complex social developments, originating in the US, encourage a more individualist outlook within society:

The significance of this is not so much at the attitudinal level, as in committing the newly-forming families to a pattern of life that absorbed an increasing share of their energies in private activities and bound them economically to the system. To buy the ‘little piece of earth with a house and a garden’ that Menzies apostrophised in a famous wartime speech, normally sent a man into debt for most of his working lifetime. To fill the house with appliances and buy the car that derisory public transport often made necessary, meant a further debt load. Merely to sustain the basic way of life the husband was locked into his job. The wife was still locked into unpaid household labour (with a slowly growing tendency to add a part-time or unskilled job to it), now in a situation where the labour was much more isolated than in the higher-density inner districts. The routines of interaction that in the interwar years had provided a basis of working-class solidarity, mutual aid and sometimes mobilisation were altered, and mobilisation correspondingly made more difficult.
This increasing social ‘atomisation’, pointed to also by Brett, leads to a new emphasis on more individual forms of leisure activity, especially television, and to more individualist forms of identity formation. Increasingly, people defined their selfhood through what they consumed rather than the work they did or the community they were members of. In his history of this period of Australian society, Donald Horne provides concrete examples of this cultural shift:

In ‘gear shops’ where the shop assistants worked barefoot on bare boards young people picked up their T-shirts from the counters and their blue denim trousers from the racks; irrespective of sex or class they were jostling each other to buy what not long before had been two of the exclusive symbols of the down-at-heel proletarian ... In their jeans they were all sisters and brothers.

Again, it is evident here that the prototypes for these new entertainment and consumption patterns are developed in the US, and US corporations and their products dominate and propagate these new industries in Australia. Concomitantly, new forms of collective political mobilisation and resistance to this individualising capitalism have also tended to originate in the US.

In the major quantitative study of its kind, Michael Emmisson has found that Australians are increasingly coming to prefer American cultural products. The industry of advertising, which in Australia is largely owned or controlled by or directly modelled on US corporations, expanded massively in the postwar years to build demand for these new American mass entertainment industries and for the broader range of products which, either directly or in terms of their style, emanated from the US. Not surprisingly the US entertainment and advertising industries have tended to either espouse or reflect American views, attitudes and assumptions. This essentially American ‘whole way of life’, and sensibility or spirit, has in the postwar period been most commonly legitimated within Australia in distinctly American terms, as an expression of people’s supposedly universal rights to and desire for (a pure or negative form of) ‘freedom’. The general postwar process of social atomisation, which ultimately fulfils American cultural ideals, breaks down local community and the impact of communal values and normative truths on people’s understanding of themselves and the world they inhabit. This encourages an essentially American individualist cultural
spirit, characterised by an idealisation of both scientism and technology, as the national sources of power and pleasure, on the one hand, and radical subjectivism, as the proper source of personal identity or individuation, on the other.

In terms of the third meaning of culture, it can be noted that in their intellectual and aesthetic work and play Australians anticipated and necessarily responded to these wider social and cultural changes. Within the social sciences of politics, anthropology, sociology, psychology and economics, a strong, direct American influence is evident in a general increasing emphasis on positivist aims and methods. Within the humanities, the influence of scientistic postmodernism does not register until after the Whitlam period, though during the Whitlam period historical and social discussion tended to be dominated by Cold War loyalties and paranoias, and hence by the question of a person’s or argument’s loyalty or otherwise to the US. And the clear trend within Australian art in the postwar context is away from previously dominant traditions of radical-nationalist realism and Anglo-European modernism and towards American models: an individualist mysticism commonly labelled abstractionism and then postmodernism, on the one hand, and a newly essentialised or puritanical form of nationalism, on the other.

The American influence on Australian art in the postwar period has been succinctly discussed by Christopher Allen. He notes that “just after the Second World War ... New York was asserting its leadership in the field of contemporary culture”. Further: “Australian art between the end of the Angry Penguins and the very different world of postmodernism can be considered from one point of view as a period defined by the tension between an ‘international’ – increasingly American – avant-garde, and a variety of local aesthetic, social or political concerns”. “Successive forms of abstraction”, he writes, “dominated Australian painting from the mid-fifties until the beginning of the seventies. Never had an aesthetic ideology achieved such a tyrannical and exclusive hold on art in Australia, threatening all who failed to submit with obsolescence and irrelevance”. “In contrast to the collective spirit that animated the art of the war years”, he adds, “abstraction drew on a romantic conception of the artist as solitary creator”. And he makes the important, related observations that “the abstract painters tended, ultimately, towards the religious horizon, even if some of them did not reach far beyond personal ‘expression’”; and that “the next phase of abstraction, hard-
edge or colour painting ... which began to take hold in the mid-sixties, proclaimed the need for a rigorous purification of the medium of painting, an elimination of all extraneous matter, all vestiges of figuration”.\(^{196}\) Even this abstractionism, then, can be traced back to the Puritan antipathy to the subjective and the social. “If Australia had persisted as landscape in the work of [John] Olsen, [Elwyn] Lynn and [Fred] Williams”, Allen concludes, “it was now reduced to mere absence: it signified nothing more than the \textit{distance} that separated the artist from the epicentre of art history in New York”.\(^{197}\) The Americanisation of Australian art entailed a disengagement from Australian society.

A more broadly conceived account of the US influence on Australian art during this period is provided by Brian Kiernan. “During the later years of the Vietnam War”, he writes, “the dominant cultural influences on younger generations in Australia, as in Western Europe, became those of the American counter culture”.\(^{198}\) “Alternatives to the perceived establishment culture in Australia”, he suggests, “followed models provided by this international, but heavily United States-inspired, counter culture”.\(^{199}\) The ‘establishment’ culture comprised generally upper-class Anglo-Australian and generally working-class radical-nationalist strands. The Australian ‘New Wave’ in the alternative theatre was inspired by American innovators and, states Kiernan, this “was followed shortly after by a not unrelated development in local filmmaking”.\(^{200}\) He goes on to note: “There was a new poetry, stimulated by New York, Black Mountain and West Coast experimentation. A ‘new’ fiction drew on American models, including some that had already responded to Latin American and contemporary European influences. There was [also] a ‘new’ journalism, again influenced by American practices, which observed a ‘new nationalism’ in the early 1970s”.\(^{201}\)

On this ‘new nationalism’, Bell and Bell write:

\begin{quote}
Paradoxically, since at least the dismissal of the Whitlam Labor government and the end of the Vietnam War, Australian television has been highly nationalistic. It yoked a commercially engineered nationalism to anti-political populism developed through commercial American-style network television. The content of Australian television, therefore, was often aggressively local, while the underlying social values that television encouraged were those appropriate to international (which meant largely American) consumer culture. It was the forms of broadcast commercial culture, not simply its manifest content, that mediated a modernity modelled on the US. The content, ironically, wasdistinctively ‘Australian’
\end{quote}
but it was the medium’s social and political relationships that were its ‘message’. 202

Similarly, Richard White argues in 1983 that “before declaring Australia’s cultural independence”, the claim that “since the mid-1960s, Americanisation has lost its force ... should be looked at more closely”. 203 The Australian film industry, for example, one of the success stories of Australia’s ‘new cultural nationalism’, is increasingly “tailored for an American market: American voice coaches have been imported to modulate the Australian accent, and American stars are inserted wherever possible”. 204 “Of far greater import” though, he notes, “is American influence in films which purport to be distinctively Australian and which deal explicitly with themes of national identity”. 205 He points to the examples of Breaker Morant and Gallipoli, two highly successful films which “certainly are distinctively Australian, if only on [sic] their emphasis on men, mateship and militarism”. 206 “But”, argues White, “their explicit conception of national identity was set out in terms of a prickly display of republican sentiment which has gone out of its way to establish grounds for Australian resentment of British imperialism”. 207 This, he says, is “an attempt to define an Australian identity in terms of a chauvinist and increasingly conservative American-style republicanism, a search for Australia’s own Boston Tea Party”. 208 White’s conclusion is compelling: “What is clear is that, while media dominance is reversible, and while the provincialism entailed by cultural dependence is a state of mind, the Americanisation process becomes far more formidable when the fundamental concepts of a society’s national identity are remodelled in the American image”. 209

Conclusion: An Incomplete Cultural Transformation

Through this broad-based Americanisation, Australian society and culture were in the postwar period becoming more receptive to the beliefs and habits of radical individualism, scientism and subjectivism, upon which neo-classical liberal public policy would depend. It is also clear, however, that unlike the situation in the US, in Australia these ways of thinking and living are not based on deep-seated cultural convictions arising from the dominant groups’ imagined experience of nature. As Brett argues, neo-classical liberal ideas “were not based in the experiences or the ideologies of any
particular section of the Australian society but were the product of technical experts with few connections with people’s commonsense economic understandings”. Puritan religion and the Puritan world view, upon which America’s radical individualism, scientism and subjectivism are based, were never as radical nor as dominant within Australia. The dominant forms of Australia’s liberal political culture, prior to the rise of neo-classical liberalism, as Brett attests, were grounded in more moderate, essentially British forms of puritan religion and notions of selfhood. Over the course of the same period, this dominant strain of Australian culture existed in primary opposition to or tension with a largely anti-puritanical, anti-liberal culture of Australian nationalism, with a defining commitment to an exclusivist, white, male, heterosexual ‘order’, or cultural code – that of mateship – the historical origins and particular elements of which were most influentially described by Russel Ward. Perhaps not surprisingly, then, in his interviews with those senior members of the public service who grew to adulthood prior to the 1970s, Pusey finds:

As far as we can judge, those who had come from comparatively humble social origins brought with them a certain empathy for the expectations of ordinary people (for what Russel Ward called ‘the Australian Dream’ and, above all, for redistributive justice and a ‘fair go’). The majority who came ... from upper middle-class backgrounds seem to have been similarly imbued, however weakly, with some Australian strain of ‘noblesse oblige’.

But “by the 1960s”, writes James Jupp in 1982, “there were three cultural influences upon Australia: British, nationalist and American”. And in 2004 he reflects: “Australia is not yet the free market society of American ideologues, but it has moved strongly in that direction since 1974”.

If Australians have adapted themselves to neo-classical liberal public policy, it seems likely that this was less because they generally believed this policy framework was ordained by God or nature than because they accepted that it was politically and economically expedient or beneficial to do so. Drawing upon the distinction between ideology and culture made in the introduction to the thesis – where ideology is the social result of relations of power, and culture is the social result of the way that the ‘unmediated’ human relations with nature are imagined – it is possible to suggest that the dominance of neo-classical liberal public policy is in the Australian context primarily an
expression of ideological rather than cultural change. There would seem to have been no solid cultural base within Australia for this set of policies that became dominant at the end of the Whitlam era. If political relations were to change, the attraction of contemporary scientism and subjectivism might fall away, while as Connell has noted, the social commitment to post-Whitlamite forms of policy, based on radical individualism, has only ever been, at best, half-hearted: “There is a great secret about neo-liberalism, which can only be whispered, but which at some level everyone knows: neo-liberalism does not have popular support”.  

In terms of cultural politics, then – the use of culture for political ends – the challenge for members of the New Right and other proponents of neo-classical liberalism has been to ‘Australianise’ this public policy framework, to assert or demonstrate that this approach to governance results from the (in practice imagined) Australian experience of nature. For as Eagleton notes, “men and women are more likely to take to the streets over cultural and material issues rather than purely political ones – the cultural being what concerns one’s spiritual identity, and the material one’s physical one”. This New Right task involves ‘Americanising’ Australia’s historical and contemporary experience of ‘nature’, ‘purifying’ or ‘puritanising’ that experience, particularly by removing or downplaying the role of government and endemic social conflict, and by reinserting God. Arguably, this state- and corporation-sponsored attempt to ‘purify’ Australian history and tradition, a cultural whitewashing, has constituted the central site of Australian cultural struggle within the Howard government’s decade of New Right rule. But this cultural conflict is as old as the New Right itself and in Australia has its origins in the Whitlam period. As will be argued in subsequent chapters examining the Australian structure of feeling during this period, the struggle over the cultural value of Whitlam, Whitlamism and neo-classical liberalism was (as it remains) fought out through an imagining or re-imagining of the Australian experience of nature, in the broad sense of this term, and so also the nature of Australian culture. Defenders of Whitlam tended to assert the ‘impurity’ of this Australian experience and culture, while defenders of the New Right sought to ‘purify’ these things.

1 Home, *Time of Hope*, p.179.
2 Ibid.
In intellectual terms, the New Right movement’s neo-classical liberal analysis and philosophy had, as Friedrich Hayek noted, three main bases: Vienna, London (the London School of Economics) and Chicago. But most of the organisational and financial impetus behind the movement came from the US. It was for example the American 1945 Reader’s Digest condensed version of Hayek’s The Road to Serfdom (1944), that brought Hayek’s ideas into the mainstream of public discussion. This condensed version sold in the US in the hundreds of thousands. See Cockett, Thinking the Unthinkable, pp.109, 100.


Sawer, ‘Political Manifestations of Libertarianism in Australia’, p.16.

Ibid., p.2.


Philip Bell and Roger Bell, Implicated: The United States in Australia, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1993, p.159.

Bell and Bell, Implicated, p.159.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

That these are the founding assumptions of neo-classical liberalism (as of classical liberalism) can be gathered from any of the major texts of this philosophy’s proponents or critics. See for example Milton Friedman’s influential neo-classical liberal treatise Free To Choose (Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1980) or for a representative critical interpretation: Stewart, Keynes and After, p.158.

See Louis Hartz, The Liberal Tradition in America: An Interpretation of American Political Thought since the Revolution, Harcourt, Brace and World, New York, 1955. Miriam Dixson draws heavily on Hartz and puts a convincing case for the continuing relevance of his historiographical approach in her The Imaginary Australian: Anglo-Celts and Identity – 1788 to the Present, UNSW Press, 1999. She summarises: “A broad-brush approach to Hartz, father of the ‘fragment’ theory about settler nations such as ours, goes like this: the politics of all the so-called ‘fragment’ (Hartz’s term) societies of the post-sixteenth-century Europe – including Australia – were disproportionately influenced by the political traditions brought to their new homes by founding generations”. The Imaginary Australian, p.22.


Hughes, Myths America Lives By, p.5.

Ibid., p.2.

Ibid., p.6.

“It is difficult to overestimate the importance” of that translation, Hughes writes, “for it helped to define and popularise in England the concept of the national covenant”. “Tyndale never claimed that England was God’s chosen people”, Hughes explains, “but the theme of national covenant implied as much”. Ibid., pp.22, 23.

Max Weber writes that the Puritans believed that: “For everyone without exception God’s Providence has prepared a calling, which he should profess and in which he should labour. And this calling is not, as it was for the Lutheran, a fate to which he must submit and which he must make the best of, but God’s commandment to the individual to work for the divine glory”. “This seemingly subtle difference”, Weber


26 Ibid., p.34.

27 Ibid., p.6.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid.

30 As Crunden notes, within American intellectual life the most adulation has tended to be reserved for the natural sciences, while the American ‘plainstyle’ dominated the arts for much of America’s history. *American Culture*, p.11.

31 States Hughes: “at its core, this myth encouraged Americans to ignore the power of history and tradition as forces that shaped the nation”. *Myths American Lives By*, p.56.

32 “Precisely because the myth of Nature’s Nation downplayed the power of history and tradition”, Hughes argues, “it found a ready and receptive audience among many American Christians”. “The Reformed tradition”, he goes on to note, “revered the founding period of the Christian faith, and many in that tradition rejected Christian history and tradition as carrying any significant authoritative weight”. Later he explains: “Those who embraced this myth all too often found in nature their own cultural traditions and then defended those traditions as fundamentally natural”. Ibid., pp.57, 58.

33 On the Second Great Awakening see James A. Henretta, David Brody and Lynn Dumenil, *America: A Concise History*, Bedford, St. Martins, Boston and New York, 1999, p.249. They write: “Religion had always been a significant part of American life. But in the decades between 1790 and 1820, a series of revivals planted the values of Protestant Christianity deep in the American national character ... The revivals that began around 1790 were much more complex than those of the First Great Awakening. In the 1740s most revivals had occurred in existing congregations; fifty years later they took place in frontier camp meetings as well and often involved the creation of new churches and denominations”.


35 Ibid.

36 Ibid., p.7.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid.

39 Ibid.


42 Ibid.

43 Ibid.

44 Ibid., p.134.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid., pp.135–136.


48 Ibid.

49 Ibid.

50 Ibid., p.148.

51 Ibid.

52 Ibid.

53 Ibid., p.149.

54 Ibid. This is not to suggest that these views are only or even uniquely American, but rather that they are strongest within the US.


56 For a general account of this period of American history see Henretta, Brody and Dumenil, *America: A Concise History*.


58 Ibid.


63 Ibid., p.315.

64 Ibid.

65 Ibid., p.318.


67 Ibid.

68 Ibid.

69 Ibid.

70 As Henry S. Albinski explains: “The American tradition of disdaining and deploring state intervention, of romanticising the idea that the government that governs the least is the one that governs best, reaches back at least to the eighteenth century and to Tom Paine. In truth, during the American colonial period and for much of the nineteenth century, American government did not ‘govern’ very much. The frontier, social variety, and atmosphere of movement and fluidity all contributed to an individualism that looked for little help from state or national organs of government”. On the other hand: “The patterns of settlement and consolidation were very different in Australia. Convict origins, authoritarian strains in the early administration, experience with settlement and consolidation that was not nearly so freewheeling and opportunity-presenting as in America, the smallness of the population, the dearth of skills and capital to allow development under private auspices: all contributed to making government in Australia the prominent agent”. ‘Australia and the United States’, in Stephen R. Graubard, ed., *Australia: The Daedalus Symposium*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1985, pp.399, 400.

71 Crunden, *American Culture*, p.15.

72 Ibid., pp.18–19.

73 For a discussion of the historical origins and social and cultural implications of this doctrine see Hughes, *Myths America Lives By*, pp.22–34. Weber notes: “The whole ascetic literature of almost all denominations is saturated with the idea that faithful labour, even at low wages, on the part of those whom life offers no other opportunities, is highly pleasing to God”. *The Protestant Ethic*, p.178.

74 “From Jefferson’s day to this”, Hughes writes, “many Americans have commonly claimed that it makes very little difference what particular religious faith one embraces, just so long as one believes in God and lives a good moral life”. “If anything”, says Hughes, the American Declaration of Independence “made Deism America’s national religion”. *Myths America Lives By*, p.54.


76 See ibid; Hughes, *Myths America Lives By*, pp.130–131; and Sydney Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1972. According to Ahlstrom (p.767), Spencer was “the greatest populariser of Darwinian notions in both Britain and America”.

77 “Australia was and still is less extreme than is the US in disparities across the income spectrum; the incomes of those in the middle- and upper-middle-class are more severely taxed and redistributed.”

78 See for example Commager, *Living Ideas in America*, pp.316–317: “A curious amalgam ... of Jeffersonian liberalism, pioneer individualism, and social Darwinism, hardened into a philosophy of laissez-faire. And this philosophy, in turn, was taken over by leading statesmen like Grover Cleveland and Herbert Hoover, by businessmen like Carnegie and Rockefeller, by jurists like Justice Field and Justice Sutherland”.

79 Though he doesn’t draw this connection so directly, Frank makes clear that the popular American idealisation of the information technology ‘new economy’ during the 1990s was grounded in the peculiarly
American, strongly individualist and pro-capitalist version of Christianity, as well as in American economic, technological and military triumphalism. See his *One Market Under God.*


81 This general argument is put by Pusey in *Economic Rationalism in Canberra.* Gavan Butler, writing at the start of the 1980s, notes more specifically: “It is really remarkable that the Friedmans can quite so cavalierly ignore all that even their colleagues in the mainstream of economics have said about the inherent tendencies towards concentration in capitalist economies”. ‘Economic Notes: The Rise of “The New Conservatism”’, *Australian Left Review* 76, 1981, p.20.

82 As Whitlam notes in his own history of his government, for example, New Right intellectuals within the Treasury refused to give policy advice in keeping with the broad political aims of the government, where, as was generally the case, this was in conflict with their neo-classical liberal perspective. *The Whitlam Government*, pp.207–210.

83 Susan Antcliff notes for example that studies arguing that poverty is linked with ‘lifecycle’ factors and thus usually a short term phenomenon, emanate from the US. ‘Behind the Rhetoric: A Closer Look at the New Right’, *Australian Quarterly* 60:1, 1988, pp.63–69. In *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life*, Free Press, New York, 1994, Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray find that the wealthy are innately smarter than other members of society, and particularly the especially ungifted black, Hispanic and ‘white trash’ components of the population. This work is critically discussed by Laurie Aarons in his *Casino Oz: Winners and Losers in Global Capitalism*, Goanna Publishing, Sydney, 1999, p.68.

84 New Right intellectual Kenneth Minogue, for example, writes that “Among the many aspects of that curious composite called ‘the New Right’, the one to which least attention has so far been given is the repudiation of collective guilt”. The ‘guilt’ described by Minogue, then Professor of Political Science at the London School of Economics and Political Science, is the recognition of structural disadvantage which began with opposition to class exploitation in early capitalism. ‘Not Guilty! The Moral Premises of Modern British Conservatism’, *Quadrant* 32:12, 1988, p.6. Notably, the title hints that Minogue’s judgement is comparable to that of a court of law.

85 Writing in 1976 Gavan Butler noted that the increasing popularity of neo-liberal economics was linked with its selling in terms of a return to traditional values. ‘Economic Notes’, p.22.

86 When ‘postwar’ is used in this unqualified way I am referring to the period following the Second World War.


88 In the assessment of Pam Stavropolous for example: “Australian critics are uninterested in the topic of Australian conservatism, and in ‘right-wing’ thought and politics more generally”. Reappraising the Right: The Challenge of Australian Conservatism*, *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 39:2, 1993, p.171.


93 Ibid., pp.10–11.

94 Ibid., p.11.

Pusey, Economic Rationalism in Canberra, p.12.

See Pusey, The Experience of Middle Australia, pp.7–12. Pusey’s general point was noted in the previous chapter. He also writes: “Who initiates and manages the new capitalism in Australia? ... The forerunner to this study demonstrated that the drivers of economic rationalism in Canberra have been top ministers and Senior Executive Service economists. In practice, this means the offices and departments of the Prime Minister, the Treasurer and the Minister of Finance – together with two or three other senior cabinet ministers – and a handful of elite and narrowly trained neo-classical economists, most of them steeped in American econometrics and with experience in Washington, the OECD, the WTO, the World Bank or the IMF”. Middle Australia, p.10. For a criticism of the lazy use of the term ‘reform’ as a synonym for neo-classical liberal policy initiatives see Verity Burgmann’s contribution to the public discussion ‘Class in Contemporary Australia’, published in Hollier, ed., Ruling Australia, p.164.

Pusey, Economic Rationalism in Canberra, p.10.

Ibid.

On this preoccupation of the German historicist tradition of social enquiry see McLellan, Ideology. He notes for example that Habermas’s “whole revision of Marx is governed by the (Frankfurt) School’s criticism of instrumental reason, the scientific or technical reason which had come to dominate society in the twentieth century” (p.67).

Pusey, Economic Rationalism in Canberra, pp.21, 22, quoting from his own chapter on “‘Rationalisation’ and Modernity’. Pusey delineates the ‘Anglo-American’ and four other models of capitalism in his The Experience of Middle Australia, p.9.

Williams, Keywords, p.77. On Williams’ stature in this field see for example Andrew Milner, ‘Culture’, in Richard Nile, ed., Australian Civilization, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1994, p.215: “The classic account of the historical evolution of the term culture and of the culturalist tradition is Raymond Williams’ Culture and Society [1958]”.

Though his views on the matter were subject to change, this argument is made by Williams in Keywords (Fontana, London, 1976) and is drawn upon more recently by Eagleton in The Idea of Culture.


Williams, Keywords, p.77.


Williams, Keywords, p.78.


Williams, Culture, p.10.

Ibid.

Quoted in Williams, Keywords, p.79.

Williams, Keywords, p.79.


An extended discussion of the anthropological and sociological uses of culture can be found in Jenks, Culture.


See Jenks, Culture, p.7.


Ibid., pp.30-31.

Williams, Keywords, p.80.

Ibid.

Ibid., pp.80-81.

Ibid., p.81.

127 Ibid.
128 Ibid.
129 Brett, *Australian Liberals and the Moral Middle Class*. Cf. Tim Rowse, *Australian Liberalism and National Character*, which does not discuss cultural bases of liberalism at all.
130 Brett, *Australian Liberals*, p.x.
131 Ibid., viii.
132 Ibid., p.41.
133 Ibid., p.126.
134 Ibid., p.40.
135 Ibid., pp.55–56.
136 Ibid., p.56.
137 Ibid., pp.68–69.
138 “In a statement that was to be echoed many times in the 1980s, [1920s Prime Minister Stanley Melbourne] Bruce insisted: ‘We were guided not by ideological motives, but by strict business principles’”.
139 Ibid., p.80.
140 Ibid., p.87.
141 Ibid., p.88.
142 Ibid., p.101.
143 Ibid., p.108.
144 Ibid., p.91.
145 Ibid., p.107.
146 See ibid., pp.105–106.
147 Ibid., p.114. The point is also made on p.117.
148 Brett’s central argument is that: “It is liberalism, albeit broadly understood and with many internal contradictions, that has provided much of the basis of the party’s enduring electoral appeal, that people have voted for the party not just because it has represented their interests but because it has accorded with what they believed”. “This”, she notes, “is an argument which flies in the face of the class-based model which has dominated interpretations of the Australian party system”. This class-based reading, she contends, “does not explain the strength and durability of the Liberals’ electoral appeal. The economic interests of the majority of the people are simply insufficiently coincidental with those of big business or financial capital”. Ibid., p.6.
149 A more extensive statement of this argument is Nathan Hollier, ‘Liberal Tides’ (a review of Brett’s *Australian Liberals and the Moral Middle Class*), *Australian Book Review* 254, 2003, pp.8–9.
151 Ibid., p.167.
152 Ibid., pp.189–190.
153 Ibid., p.190.
154 For an example of this general argument see Christopher Norris, *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice*, Methuen, London and New York, 1982.
155 Barrett, *The Prime Minister’s Christmas Card*.
158 “Most national economies are now globally interdependent, and highly concentrated, being dominated by a few hundred large corporations”. Wheelwright, ‘The Age of the Transnational Corporations’, p.123.
162 I am thinking especially of the work of Jacques Derrida, Francois Lyotard and Jean Baudrillard. This can be contrasted with the work of more materialist thinkers whose work is sometimes labelled postmodernist, such as that of David Harvey or Frederic Jameson.
163 Bell and Bell, *Implicated*, p.x.
164 Ibid.


According to White: “After the war British culture in Australia was threatened by both the military reorientation of Cold War politics and the full industrialisation of Australia, which was underwritten by the United States, fed by large-scale European immigration and based on a mass consumer economy. Americanisation became more intense in the traditional areas of influence, took on new forms and for the first time seriously ate into the high and middlebrow cultures. There was a reassertion of American influence in the film, radio and record industries after the retreat of the 1930s, and the advertising industry expanded considerably to provide basic infrastructure for the new consumer industries”. ‘A Backwater Awash’, p.118. James Curran argues that most Australians felt strongly British until the early 1960s. He states: “When (Australia’s) intense British race patriotism collapsed around the time of Britain’s first, ultimately failed attempt to enter the EEC between 1961 and 1963 and its decision to withdraw a military presence from East of Suez, Australian political leaders and intellectuals were left somewhat confused as to how to define the nation. Australians did not immediately claim a new identity; they were actually shocked, and in some cases aggrieved, that their British identity had been taken from them. It was nothing less than a crisis of national meaning”. James Curran, ‘Correspondence’, in Robert Manne (with David Corlett), Sending Them Home: Refugees and the New Politics of Indifference (Quarterly Essay 13), Black Inc., Melbourne, 2004, p.109. As early as 1967 however, according to Geoffrey Serle: “We are happily – or phlegmatically – exchanging one neo-colonial situation for another. Australia has abandoned the prospect of independent nationhood; we are going to become just slightly different sorts of Americans”. Geoffrey Serle, ‘Godzone: Austerica Unlimited?’, Meanjin 26, 1967, p.240.

See White, ‘A Backwater Awash’, p.111. He suggests that “perhaps the best distinction between (high and popular culture), which avoids the whole fraught question of ‘quality’, is in terms of self-consciousness. High culture is aware of itself as something called culture, and this has all sorts of implications for cultural traditions, patronage, access to resources and the production of knowledge; popular culture is not as self-conscious, seeing itself essentially as entertainment”.

Brett writes for example that “to participate in a meeting” prior to the Second World War was “not only to enact the obligations of citizenship, and manifest one’s virtuous character; one was also (participating) in the wisdom of the British race and its civilising mission”. Australian Liberals and the Moral Middle Class, p.68.

According to White: “The Second World War, and the temporary presence of American troops in Australia as part of the war against Japan, saw crucial changes in the pattern of Australia’s international relationships. Australia ... now turned to the United States”. ‘A Backwater Awash’, p.118. It was widely acknowledged during the war that, as Geoffrey Bolton writes, “only the United States could be Australia’s prop and shield”. The Middle Way, p.9.

As Bell and Bell state, “more than any other society, the US embodied and encouraged that which was modern in the postwar world”. “US corporations, commerce, and its culture of consumer capitalism”, they go on to explain, “were the most powerful vehicles of influence abroad ... The global reach of government, corporations, and media projected America overseas as an exceptionally affluent, open, dynamic, and virtuous society – the model against which all others should measure their lives”. Moreover, “American comics, movies, and records linked many ... emerging subcultures, or taste-cultures, to dynamic commercial entertainment and leisure pursuits that frequently endorsed the image of the US as the metropolitan ‘centre’ around which satellite cultures spun”. “Notions of economic freedom and consumer choice”, they contend, “were reiterated in every advertisement. Capitalism, consumerism and the modern were synonymous”, “The modernisation of Australia”, in their view, “increasingly followed a distinctly American form”. Implicated, pp.160, 160–161, 167–168, 168, xii.

See White, ‘A Backwater Awash’, p.114. White notes also that television “penetrated more rapidly [into the middlebrow culture] than radio, which was introduced before a true mass consumer market existed in Australia, and which suffered from having to expand in a Depression. What also distinguished television from radio was the fact that, with fewer channels, there was not the same scope for market differentiation. The commercial stations, in seeking to serve a single market, strove to be identical. There was no room, as
there had been on the radio dial, for specifically middlebrow networks. To accept television, middlebrow culture had to adjust to Americanisation”. ‘A Backwater Awash’, p.119.

Barrett notes for example that in the postwar context: “While America’s politicians, generals and diplomats maintained and expanded their nation’s power and influence around the globe, and America’s corporate leaders prosecuted the economic war, American bureaucrats were hard at work promoting the elite end of American cultural production to a global audience”. And he points out also that: “The worldwide acceptance of things American, of the mass culture products of Hollywood and the music industry, was partnered by a general acceptance of the serious end of American cultural production as well: the products of modernist American literature, music, and painting”. The Prime Minister’s Christmas Card, pp.71, 72. According to Ian Burn, Nigel Lendon, Charles Merewether and Ann Stephen, the 1967 ‘Two Decades of American Painting’ exhibition had “a profound effect on a younger generation of artists in Australia, giving authority to the range of styles encompassed by New York art. It also served to popularise the concept of the avant-garde, thus identified in contemporary terms as a specifically American phenomenon”. Ian Burn, Nigel Lendon, Charles Merewether and Ann Stephen, The Necessity of Australian Art: An Essay About Interpretation, Power Publications, Sydney, 1988, p.95.

The postwar high art market, explains Christopher Allen, “which had developed into its modern form in New York, soon spread to Australia, if in a somewhat less aggressive form, replacing the traditional artists’ association as the intermediary between painters and their public”. “The art world”, Allen explains further, “was already becoming top-heavy with publicists and ‘theorists’ who helped to accelerate evolutions in taste ... especially when the social bonds among artists, and between artists and public, were being weakened by the new market structure”. Art in Australia: From Colonisation to Postmodernity, Thames and Hudson, London, 1997, pp.177, 180.

In White’s persuasive narrative: “Among intellectuals in Australia, the old loyalties were disrupted in the 1950s. The ruling class adjusted from their old mercantilist base to an industrial one. They could stop calling England ‘Home’. For the new Right [sic.] Britain was old-fashioned and, worse, socialist. They still had qualms about American culture but learned to live with them. Their anti-communism got the better of them: Americanisation was no longer a threat but reflected only the tattered remnant of outgrown Anglophile fears”. “With the Cold War”, states White, “Americanisation, which had once represented gross disloyalty, was now acceptable as ‘the price of freedom’”. White, ‘A Backwater Awash’, pp.119, 119–120.

Elsewhere he writes: “A New Right was [in the mid 1970s] emerging in the pages of Quadrant and the Bulletin. Its proponents had no awkward intellectual loyalties to Britain. For them, England was old fashioned and, worse, socialist, and they had no qualms about looking to America, for protection, investment and inspiration. As early as 1949, the Liberal Party’s Institute of Public Affairs was arguing that Australia needed ‘the American attitude of mind ... leaders who can bring the nation to a new way of life’”. ‘Combating Cultural Aggression: Australian Opposition to Americanisation’, Meanjin 39, 1980, p.284. Marian Sawer notes that Quadrant turned to neo-classical liberal, or what she terms ‘libertarian’ ideas in 1974. ‘Political Manifestations of Libertarianism in Australia’, p.15.

For Bruce Grant, “the American defence connection was intended to protect the Australian way of life, and the American way of life itself was the current model of civilisation standing against the threat of communism”. He argues further that “this was ‘liberty’ based on American, not British experience, including the American belief that the capitalist system was the sine qua non of personal and national freedom”. The Australian Dilemma: A New Kind of Western Society, McDonald Futura, Sydney, 1983, p.57. In Bell and Bell’s summary, Australia’s “security arrangements, economic ties, and political culture were increasingly the product of a new international order dominated by American interests – interests that propagated uncompromising anti-communism within a rhetoric of liberal internationalism”. Implicated, p.159. They note also that John Docker and others have argued that, “Australia’s emergence as a modern industrial society ‘meant in effect moving from a British to an American model’”. Implicated, p.157, quoting Docker in the Sydney Morning Herald, 19 December 1987. See also Stuart Ward, Australia and the British Embrace: The Demise of the Imperial Ideal, Melbourne University Press, 2001.

As Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant suggest, the postwar period saw a “refashioning of social relations and cultural practices in advanced societies after the US pattern – founded on the pauperisation of the state, the commodification of public goods and the generalisation of social insecurity”. ‘On the Cunning of Imperialist Reason’, Theory, Culture and Society 16:1, 1999, p.43.

“By the early 1980s, the US had become Australia’s principal source of imports and its second most important export outlet. The United States had also become the foremost overseas investor in Australia

In Graeme Davison’s summary: “If we examine the range of American innovations in urban life which came in the 1950s, they display a distinct family resemblance. Underlying them all is the Fordist logic of functional analysis, survey and measurement, subdivision of function, and flow technology. As that logic was applied to one area of Australian business or public management, it cleared the way for its application to others; like the logic of economic rationalism, thirty years later, it had a powerful internal dynamic. Whether it is the development of the project house, market research and supermarket design, traffic research and highway design, scientific management and factory layout, the American imprint was unmistakable”. Graeme Davison, ‘Driving to Austerica: The Americanization of the Postwar Australian City’, in Harold Bolitho and Chris Wallace-Crabbe, eds, Approaching Australia: Papers from the Harvard Australian Studies Symposium, Harvard University Committee on Australian Studies, Cambridge, Mass., 1997, p.176.

This argument is set out most comprehensively in Connell and Irving, Class Structure in Australian History, pp.270–310. For an account of the impact of this general process of industrialisation and post-industrialisation within the US see Robert Putnam, Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community, Simon & Schuster, New York, 2000. Bell and Bell usefully note that “Australian consumerism was increasingly modelled on that of the US from at least the mid 1950s”. Australian businessmen, they write, flocked to America to learn about new modes of selling and management as well as new products: “supermarkets, where the customers served themselves (from 1951), shopping centres, surrounded by car parks (from 1957), and motels, were the most significant new features of suburban dependence on cars instead of trains and buses”. They argue that “the new car-based consumerism replaced department-store and strip-shop suburban buying and thereby accelerated changes in the nature of suburban and country town ‘community’”. This “linked gender to retailing directly modelled on the US pattern of ‘one-stop shopping’ in shopping centres (later ‘malls’), which became a focal point of what had been more traditional community interactions centred on the church, the pub, and the main street” “The specific aims of Australian industry and retailers”, they go on to say, “were directly imitative of American models”. And they note as well that “the social and cultural changes represented by the purchase and preparation of food have been strongly influenced by American practices and American corporations”. Bell and Bell, Implicated, pp.168, 169, drawing on M. Rolfe, ‘Americanisation and Suburbia’, seminar presented to School of Political Science, University of NSW, 15 October 1991, unpublished.

Connell, Ruling Class, Ruling Culture, p.216.

White sees television as the “most important” vehicle for the postwar Americanisation of Australian culture. ‘A Backwater Awash’, p.119.

Horne, Time of Hope, p.34.

“In three major areas of cultural consumption – television, music and literature – young Australians display a preference for programs, musicians and authors emanating from the US to a far greater extent than Australians in middle age, who in their turn are more disposed towards American cultural materials than older Australians ... The evidence presented here documents a consistent trend within Australia towards the consumption of cultural products emanating from North America and points to an increasing Americanisation of Australian society”. Michael Emmison, ‘Transformations of Taste: Americanisation, Generational Change and Australian Cultural Consumption’, Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology 33:3, 1997, pp.323, 340.

“Advertising as we know it originated in the US and almost all the international advertising organisations originate from the US also”. Bill Bonney and Helen Wilson, Australia’s Commercial Media, Macmillan, South Melbourne, 1983, p.133. “Whether one defines the Australian advertising industry as American-controlled, or as trans-nationally controlled”, add Bell and Bell, “it is clear that much of the expertise, ideology, and technical style of advertising continued to originate in the US parent industry”. Implicated, p.175. According to White, “the advertising industry expanded considerably [in the postwar period] to provide basic infrastructure for the new consumer industries”. ‘A Backwater Awash’, p.118.

Bell and Bell note for example that “On the eve of the American (and later Australian) invasion of South-East Asia against the ‘communist menace’ allegedly emanating from China, Australia’s most popular cultural pastime – watching television – was dominated by images of American domestic harmony, police, and the law pursuing American justice, and sagas of the expansion of White settlement into the American West”. “These routine genres”, they state further, “became as familiar to Australians as they
were to Americans, and through audience identification with their repetitive patterns of conquest over domestic disharmony, deviance, and the savage wilderness, it could be argued that many Australians accepted the invitation to see the world as popular American mythologies saw it. “That more Australians watched ‘Roots’ than any other television broadcast prior to 1980”, they contend further, “suggests that the idioms and cultural content of American history and American television were familiar and pleasurable in Australia”. “Three years after the introduction of television, in 1959, all of the ‘top-ten’ programs in Australia”, they note elsewhere, “originated in the US”. “American hegemony is seldom questioned [on the television news]”, they write. “Instead it is seen as ‘natural’ – while antagonistic forces are seen as threatening the US, which is represented to its viewers as a ‘victim’. American political authority is endorsed even as it is apparently being sanitised”. Also relevant, finally, is their observation that “increasingly, as happened during the 1970s, especially in the US, Australian news and current affairs television has projected formal politics as contests over economic management”. *Implicated*, 173–174, 173, 183, 185.

In White’s estimation, in the postwar period the US came “to represent the democratic way and all that was worth fighting for”. White, ‘A Backwater Awash’, p.118.

In James Jupp’s view: “The social sciences in the English-speaking world were completely dominated from the United States by the early 1960s. As tertiary education expanded in Australia, American-influenced teaching and methodology gained influence”. Jupp, *Party Politics: Australia 1966–1981*, George Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1982, p.9. For an example of this argument in relation to the Australian economics discipline see J.E. King, *A History of Post Keynesian Economics Since 1936*, Edward Elgar, Cheltenham, UK and Northampton, USA, 2002, pp.140–145 especially; and also Whitwell, *The Treasury Line*; and P. Groenewegen, ‘The Australian Experience’, in A.W. Coats, ed., *The Post-1945 Internationalisation of Economics*, Duke University Press, Durham, NC, 1996, pp.61–79. King writes that Keynes’ “General Theory” conquered Australia with a speed and thoroughness that would have impressed the Spanish Inquisition, so that by 1945 there was no more totally Keynesian economics profession in the world”. In his view “this reflected not only the intensity of the country’s suffering in the Great Depression but also the fact that *laissez faire* had never really taken hold there. European settlement itself was the direct result of state intervention, and both the colonial and (after 1901) the Commonwealth governments played a major role in economic life”. He goes on to recount how “there was ... something of a ‘Keynesian revolution’ in economic policy, spearheaded by public servants of high intellectual calibre like H.C. ‘Nugget’ Coombs and Leslie Melville. By 1945 the ‘Treasury Line’ was unashamedly Keynesian, and would remain so for another three decades”. Peter Groenewegen has conducted research revealing the predominance of British textbooks within Australia until the 1960s. King notes the “continuing strength of the Cambridge connection [where Keynes studied] until Harvard and Chicago took over as the natural destination for the talented young Australian economist in the 1960s”. Most advocates of the Keynesian neoclassical synthesis were, as already mentioned, from the US. By the early and mid-1970s, “the leading US journals had become effectively closed to Post Keynesian ideas and alternative outlets had yet to emerge”. King summarises: “Radical economics of all descriptions was just beginning a pronounced and continuing decline, reinforced in the Australian case by the unfortunate legacy of the 1972–75 Whitlam Labor government and an unusually strong business and academic reaction against the country’s statist and protectionist traditions. Added to this was the accelerating Americanisation of the economics profession which was evident in the recruitment, publishing and research degree practices of most (if not yet all) economics departments in Australian universities. The future lay with neo-classical theory, particularly with the militantly deregulationist and avowedly anti-Keynesian variant of neo-liberalism known locally as ‘economic rationalism’”. King, *A History of Post-Keynesian Economics*, pp.141, 142, 143, 144. A powerful comment on the global Americanisation of intellectual discourse is provided by Bourdieu and Wacquant: ‘On the Cunning of Imperialist Reason’. “Cultural imperialism”, they write, “rests on the power to universalise particularisms linked to a singular historical tradition by causing them to be misrecognised as such. “Today”, they suggest, “numerous topics directly issuing from the intellectual confrontations relating to the social particularity of American society and of its universities have been imposed, in apparently de-historicised form, upon the whole planet”. “The neutralisation of the historical context resulting from the international circulation of texts and from the correlative forgetting of their originating historical conditions”, they state, “produces an apparent universalisation further abetted by the work of ‘theorisation’”, p.41.
Bourdieu and Wacquant note that ‘postmodernism’ emanates as a movement most emphatically from the US. ‘On the Cunning of Imperialist Reason’, p.42.

“In Australia”, write Bell and Bell, “the ideology of McCarthyism and the Cold War were quickly grafted to the rhetoric of Empire and monarchy”. “Increasingly”, they state, “local enemies of capital were linked in the public imagination to the enemies of capitalism abroad. Communists, socialists, and communist sympathisers – whether trade unionists, peace advocates, political activists, writers, or intellectuals – were portrayed and persecuted as collaborators with the new enemy, international communism”. Implicated, pp.162, 164. In a more personal register, Chris Wallace-Crabbe, a lecturer in English at Melbourne University, recalls that “in those high, polar years of the Cold War, many of us reacted to its encampments with a sense of ‘a plague on both your houses’”; his account giving a sense of the pervasiveness of these Cold War issues even for those who wished to remain ‘above’ them. Wallace-Crabbe, ‘The Quaker Graveyard in Carlton’, in Joan Kirkby, ed., The American Model: Influence and Independence in Australian Poetry, Hale and Iremonger, Sydney, 1982, p.44.

Allen, Art in Australia.

Ibid., p.147.

Ibid.

Ibid., p.154.

Ibid., p.155.

Ibid., pp.155, 170–171.

Ibid., p.171.


Kiernan, ‘Cultural Transmission’, p.69.

Ibid., p.70.

Ibid., p.70.

Bell and Bell, Implicated, p.187.

White, ‘A Backwater Awash’, p.120.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid., pp.120–121.

Brett, Australian Liberals, p.181. James Walter’s summation of Brett’s argument is useful here: “As Judith Brett has ... shown us, the ‘moral middle class’ fostered by Menzies saw its own interests as not wholly self-directed but as involving common purposes and working together to achieve them”. ‘Maggie Thatcher: My Part in her Downfall’. Meanjin 3, 2004, p.155.


Pusey, Economic Rationalism in Canberra, p.161. The emphasis is mine.


Hugh Collins argues for example in a highly influential article that “the mental universe of Australian politics is essentially Benthamite”. He means by this that “the dominant ideology of this society conforms to the essential character of Jeremy Bentham’s political philosophy. Three aspects of Bentham’s thought are crucial here: his utilitarianism, his legalism, and his positivism”’. ‘Political Ideology in Australia: The Distinctiveness of a Benthamite Society’, in Graubard, ed., Australia: The Daedalus Symposium, p.148.


There are numerous accounts and periodisations of the Anglo-American ‘culture wars’. In the American context Frank persuasively dates these to 1968: “What beat the Left in America wasn’t inflation and uppity workers, it was the culture war. Starting with the Nixon campaign in 1968 and continuing up through the Gingrich years, the American right paid the bills by handing out favours to business, but it won elections by provoking, organising, and riding a massive populist backlash against the social and cultural changes of the 1960s”. *One Market Under God*, p.25. In the Australian context, Barrett demonstrates, the ‘culture wars’ can be seen as having got underway with the Right’s use of populist rhetoric to attack Whitlamite intellectual ‘elites’, especially over the government’s purchase of Jackson Pollock’s *Blue Poles*. See *The Prime Minister’s Christmas Card*. An important, in the sense of ‘clear’, marker of this developing culture war is John Singleton’s 1970s free-market ‘Worker’s Party’.
Chapter Three

A Civilisation of Decency? Patrick White, Gough Whitlam and Anglo-Australian Cultural Tradition

Patrick White was a very strong supporter of the Whitlam-led Australian Labor Party and the Whitlam government. This is well known and has been documented by White’s biographer David Marr and by White himself, in his ‘self-portrait’ *Flaws in the Glass* and in other writings and speeches.¹ Bernard Hickey has suggested perceptively that White and Whitlam were bound together by “one unifying, informing spirit”, that of “humaneness”.² Beyond that observation, however, there has been very little discussion of the fundamental reasons why White supported Whitlam, no consideration of whether or not this support is in any way reflected within or transmuted into White’s literary works, and no systematic account of the possible political and cultural significance of this support.

In this chapter it will be argued that White supported Whitlam primarily because these two men possessed a common outlook derived from their mutual experience of and shared response to a Protestant, rationalist, Anglo-centric strand of Australian culture.³ White and Whitlam remained attached to ideals deriving from this culture – in particular the puritan emphases on duty and vocation – and so were also strongly resistant to forms of radical individualism and greed. During the period between White’s conscious politicisation, in the mid 1960s, and Whitlam’s dismissal in 1975, this shared outlook is developed and advanced within White’s major literary works: the novels *The Solid Mandala* (1966), *The Vivisector* (1970) and *The Eye of the Storm* (1973).⁴

White’s support for Whitlam is especially significant because White was born into and grew up within an archetypal, ruling-class Anglo-Australian familial culture, because he and his literary works directly appealed to and represented the cultural capital of that segment of society within the Australian public sphere, and because his chosen medium of the novel was until the mid-1970s esteemed in popular and intellectual circles as the ‘highest’ (and so ostensibly least political) form of cultural expression.⁵ Though the relationship between art, politics and society is (as already argued) inherently dialectical, and the impact of art on politics and society is especially hard to measure, it
does seem likely that, in embodying a shared, fundamentally Protestant Anglo-Australian social vision, White’s literary work did make a powerful if subtle contribution to Whitlam’s political project.

**Personal and Political Connections**

Having initially been only a reluctant supporter of Whitlam, White was by the time of the 1972 election both convinced by Whitlam’s reform agenda and considerably excited about what a Whitlam government could achieve. Over the course of the Whitlam government he wrote several letters to Whitlam, mostly commenting on policy, but with a visible personal dimension. He became a close friend of Whitlam-government Senator Jim McClelland and of McClelland’s wife Freda. At a dinner party held by the McClellands, White was approached by Governor-General Sir John Kerr and asked to accept membership of the Order of Australia that Whitlam was introducing to supplement the British Honours system. Though his personal principles forbade him accepting such awards, he relented in order not to undermine this Whitlam initiative. In spite of his congenital dislike of public speaking and the fact that many of his friends and relations would disapprove, White appeared as the major speaker at a 13 May 1974 Opera House rally of artists and intellectuals organised by the McClellands to provide support for Whitlam in the lead-up to the 1974 federal election. According to Paul Brennan and Christine Flynn, “White, the main speaker, won the heart of a capacity crowd of three thousand”. Marr adds: “White spoke for seven exhilarating minutes and knew for the first time what it was to have the feel of an enormous audience”. This unique political event was in a sense made possible by White’s agreeing to participate, for a ‘name’ was necessary to give the event legitimacy and attract other public figures.

White referred to the Dismissal as “the cataclysm”. It had a devastating personal effect on him and, in one way or another, on those around him. White ended friendships with people who supported the actions of Prime Minister Fraser or Governor-General Kerr. He wrote in 1981 that “The Australian community was split on 11 November 1975 and has remained so”. As Marr recounts, the ‘cataclysm’: filled [White] with disgust: at the greed and impatience of the conservatives, at those who applauded this bizarre royal exercise, at all those Australians who continued to fawn on the Queen, and at himself for
having broken his own rules by accepting an [Order of Australia] honour from Kerr. This disgust fuelled White’s politics through the years ahead. After 11 November he became more absolute, a stern puritan and a more convinced republican. All about him he saw the evil power of money in politics. The offices of Governor and Governor-General had to go, and he urged a total boycott. Even before scanning the Deaths, he turned each morning to the vice-regal column in the Sydney Morning Herald to see who had broken ranks to eat with Kerr and his successors at Yarralumla. Though almost toothless, White agreed to appear on television to speak for Labor. ‘How unsuited I am to these public appearances, even with my teeth, but I shall have to do it’.

On 28 November 1975 White, along with many other artists gathered at Sydney’s Capitol Theatre, called for the re-election of Labor. On the first anniversary of the coup, White appeared at a Sydney Town Hall meeting organised by Citizens for Democracy, a republican group calling for a new constitution and a Bill of Rights, stating:

I present to you the following resolution: We Australian citizens meeting together for the first anniversary of the dismissal of an elected Australian government express our continuing concern and outrage at the event of 11 November 1975 and our firm determination to help ensure that such events will never occur again.

On 28 January 1978, in the aftermath of Whitlam’s and Labor’s 1977 federal election defeat, White spoke at the testimonial dinner organised to mark Whitlam’s departure from formal politics. At this event, White spoke of Whitlam in the reverent, almost biblical tones that Whitlam often inspired:

Gough’s worst flaw as a politician was that he had in him nothing of the hypocrite. He fell foul of the powerful few by trying to serve the cause of the many. He is an idealist in a world dicing with destruction for the sake of material returns. He is a great man and that is reason enough in this country for sticking him with niggling pins, slashing him with knives, cutting him down. But Gough will not lie down and die, either as a man, or as an influence. For many of us it has been an inspiration to have lived through the Whitlam era. We shall continue to revere this concerned, this humane man and his wife Margaret.

White’s basic account here remained unchanged over the rest of his life. He spoke of Whitlam’s fate as a tragedy, in terms strongly reminiscent of Manning Clark, a historian White much admired and with whom he shared a broadly Anglo-Australian cultural
In affectionate mood White named one of his two cats “Gough”. After Fraser’s initial federal election victory White wrote to his agent Juliet O’Hea on 21 December: “We shall now return to everything I have always hated about Australia under the rule of sunny Philistia”. Following Fraser’s second victory in the elections of 1977, White wrote to Clark: “The fascist sheep got what they wanted; let them now reap the results”. As Marr writes, “the sacking of Whitlam by the Governor-General was the decisive political event of Patrick White’s life: he became a radical republican and his anger at the conservatives never left him”.

White’s support for Whitlam was enthusiastically reciprocated. In his own history of his government Whitlam refers to White as “always a staunch and honoured supporter of my government”. This isn’t strictly true, since after the 2 December 1972 election of Whitlam, White was soon disillusioned with how little progressive change the government was able to introduce. He wrote letters to Whitlam protesting concessions to Japanese publishers, export of wheat to Egypt after the 1973 Arab–Israel war and Labor’s support for sandmining on Fraser Island, but Whitlam’s statement does indicate something of the extent to which he valued White’s support. Partly, no doubt, this was for political reasons. White’s winning of the 1973 Nobel Prize provided a significant boost for Whitlam’s political campaign to raise the public appreciation of Australian arts and artists. As Whitlam noted: “no event did more to secure and enhance the international reputation of Australian art and letters”. Whitlam sought to capitalise on this victory by inviting White on to the floor of the House of Representatives to receive the House’s congratulations. As Marr records, “the only civilian ever to be given this accolade before was the aviator Bert Hinkler who made the first solo flight from London to Australia in 1928”. White declined, citing personal reasons, though thanking Whitlam for the offer: “Unfortunately, this is the kind of situation to which my nature does not easily adapt itself”. But there was also, evidently, a personal connection between the two men: White spoke (as already mentioned) at Whitlam’s 29 January 1978 testimonial dinner, Whitlam attended a 1979 production of White’s play The Cheery Soul, and they dined together while in Athens to attend the 1983 tenth anniversary of the student occupation of the Polytechnic (a crucial event in the overturning of the colonels’ dictatorship in that country). With the assistance of the Commissioner of Taxation, Whitlam made special
arrangements to exempt from ordinary taxation law the Patrick White Award, for older, insufficiently recognised authors, that White set up with the money from the Nobel.\textsuperscript{35} Whitlam described White’s Award as an act of “typical magnanimity and farsightedness” and as an “admirable and selfless gesture”.\textsuperscript{36} In \textit{A Certain Grandeur}, Graham Freudenberg’s account of Whitlam’s life in politics, White is referred to as “the best man ... of his generation and type, if so rare a spirit can be said to be a type”,\textsuperscript{37} and his experience of the Whitlam government is juxtaposed against that of those who were unable to recognise the government’s worth: “For (an Edward) St John [Q.C.] who found (the period of the Whitlam government) a time for fear, there is a Patrick White, a Manning Clark, who found it a time of liberation”.\textsuperscript{38}

Though they discuss the arts in general terms, White is the only artist Whitlam and Freudenberg single out for special mention in their respective histories of the period, indicating their belief in the significance of the role White played in building support at the cultural level for the form of society Whitlam and Freudenberg desired. As Whitlam’s great political ambition was to promote social equality,\textsuperscript{39} his great cultural ambition was necessarily to raise public appreciation for the arts: having set out to overcome radical, competitive individualism and narrow, materialistic greed, and so having professedly done away with the individual’s short-term chance of attaining maximum personal wealth, what Whitlam could offer in return was a more educated and aesthetically enriched life. Hence the importance Whitlam attached to the development of the arts. Introducing the \textit{Australia Council Bill} on 21 March 1974, he stated: “Artists have an essential role to play in society. No one can imagine a mature civilisation without their contribution”.\textsuperscript{40} “My objective”, he recalled later, “was to extend the benefits and rewards of the arts – the greatest civilising and humanising force in our lives – to a wider and less privileged audience”.\textsuperscript{41} “I recognised from the outset”, he states further, that even with the most generous and imaginative schemes the arts could not be grafted onto a society that was barren and hostile to them. In the long run public appetites for literature and the arts would depend on the kind of society we created. Our policies of the arts have therefore to be judged in conjunction with our broader policies for education and social reform.\textsuperscript{42}
By the same token, a more just society is one more likely to value the arts: “Education and social reform may not be cures for all our ills, but a society that cares about education and social reform will be a society that cares about literature and the arts. It will be well supplied with the qualities of understanding, sensitivity, discrimination and compassion that are the basis of artistic creativity”. In his clearest statement on this subject Whitlam declares:

In any civilised community the arts and associated amenities must occupy a central place. Their enjoyment should not be seen as something remote from everyday life. Of all the objectives of my government none had a higher priority than the encouragement of the arts, the preservation and enrichment of our cultural and intellectual heritage. Indeed I would argue that all the other objectives of a Labor government – social reform, justice and equity in the provision of welfare services and educational opportunities – have as their goal the creation of a society in which the arts and the appreciation of spiritual and intellectual values can flourish. Our other objectives are all means to an end; the enjoyment of the arts is an end in itself.

This comment could as easily have been made by White. In the content and style of his artistic work and in the values he espoused during the Whitlam period, White was the nation’s great representative of this cultural goal. In a meaningful sense, White embodied Whitlam’s hopes for a better – more just – Australian culture.

It is even more true to say that Whitlam was the political embodiment of White’s hopes for a better Australian culture. Speaking at the 1974 Opera House rally, White explained his reasons for supporting Whitlam:

Some of you to whom I am speaking may be in a quandary over how to cast your vote – as I too found myself in a quandary at a certain point in the post-Menzies era. Brought up in the Liberal tradition, I realised we had reached the stage where a change had to be made – that we must cure ourselves of mentally constipated attitudes, heave ourselves out of that terrible stagnation which has driven so many creative Australians to live in other parts of the world ... to offer an intellectual climate from which others won’t feel the need to escape is most important and necessary, and this is what the Whitlam government is trying to do. I support it also for its genuine efforts to alleviate poverty, and its attempts to come to grips with that most complex of all our problems, the Aborigines, both tribal and urban. I think we have come at last to understand the important part spiritual association plays in the lives of Aborigines in their original tribal surroundings. I hope we are beginning to realise the importance of these
associations in the lives of white communities, particularly in the more neglected suburbs of our cities, and that the wholesale uprooting of human beings without regard for their feelings can have the most distressing psychological effects. The Whitlam government, I believe, recognises and respects the rights of the defenceless to a degree that the Opposition, with its subservience to monied interests, cannot pretend to emulate.  

As Whitlam suggested above, White avers: a better society would be one in which there is a greater awareness of and respect for artistic creativity, as opposed to material acquisition and / or brute strength, and in which humans are valued for their humanity, as opposed to their wealth or power.

In the other major statement of his reasons for supporting Whitlam, delivered at Whitlam’s 1978 testimonial dinner, White states that as an artist he has a “fellow feeling” for Whitlam, a “creative politician” who, like “artists of any kind”, takes risks, and “troubles the spirit, the conscience, the dormant imagination of the average man”. As “no doubt this is why the creative artist in Australia has always been somewhat suspect”, so too with Whitlam: “a creative politician [is one] whom the competent one sees as threatening perhaps his prosperity by offering a liberating, forward-looking way of life”. For White, as for Whitlam, true creativity and humanity are inconsistent with narrow, competitive individualism and materialistic greed. White continues: “I believe this is why Gough Whitlam has had such an immense appeal for so many of my fellow artists. Not only because he understands and patronises the arts, but because he is a man of creative vision”. White repeatedly draws this distinction between the humane values of Whitlam and the inherently selfish and greedy values of mainstream Australia: “Present ease and gratification”, White diagnoses in 1977, “these seem the extent of our aims and ambitions in Australia today – or at least Australia as it has been run since the ubiquitous event of 11 November 1975”. In the same speech he states: “I am fitted to speak, I like to think, on how our hearts, minds, our way of life should change before we can have the Australia we want. I am an artist ... the creative arts can only survive if we are politically creative as well. The Whitlam era, particularly the inspiring figure of Gough Whitlam himself, gave us [artists] this hope – which was so abjectly destroyed on November 11, 1975”. Still further clarification is provided by White in his self-portrait:
After the coup of 1975 and the disastrous election which followed, I have remained a Labour [sic] supporter because, however idiotically those who lead the party behave at times, and however the unions may grasp at increased material benefits, the cynical example of the ruling class in this philistine non-culture, of money, wheels and swimming pools, does not encourage me to go along with it.  

Clearly, White shared Whitlam’s core belief that competitive individualism and materialistic greed were not proper bases for social harmony or even true personal happiness, and this is why he supported Whitlam so passionately.

**A Common Cultural Heritage**

As argued in the previous chapter, mainly through reference to Brett’s recent historical account of Australian liberalism, the contention that the actions of the individual and society must be grounded in a selfless moral base, that radical individualism and greed are not proper bases of behaviour or policy, is representative of a distinctively Protestant, Anglocentric tradition within Australian culture. As Brett makes clear, until the mid-1960s this tradition was very widely and strongly held; often, even generally, superseding class or socio-economic differences. In Marxist terms this moralism can be seen as a central element of the society’s ruling-class ideology or culture. The main proponents of both classical and ‘new’, interventionist or humanist forms of liberalism, within and outside of the major political parties, continued to couch their appeals to voters in these puritan moral terms of ‘selflessness’ and duty until Fraser at least.

Even in relation to the processes of colonialism and imperialism, where the subjection of many peoples to the demands of the empire’s ruling class is more directly visible, the sustaining British myth of dutiful selfless morality was brought into play. As Joseph Conrad sets out in his classic critical engagement with European colonisation, *Heart of Darkness*:

The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much. What redeems it is the idea only. An idea at the back of it, not a sentimental pretence but an idea; and an unselfish belief in the idea – something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to.
Conrad was a close observer and an admirer of the British and in the quotation above is drawing a distinction between the approaches to colonialism of the (moral) British and the (rapacious) Belgians in the Congo. British society, most instrumental in the development of and benefitting most strongly from what Eric Hobsbawm termed ‘the age of empire’ – the period of unbridled global capitalist and colonial expansion between 1875 and 1914 – perhaps also spawned the most subtle and sophisticated justifications for colonisation and exploitation.\textsuperscript{54} The British created and cultivated a notion of themselves as the most humane and liberal society, or civilisation, at home and abroad. Rudyard Kipling famously went so far as to suggest that the people referred to by Conrad as having ‘a different complexion or slightly flatter noses’ were “the white man’s burden” (1899). Leaving aside the often perfidious nature of this Anglocentric moralism – captured in the ironic epithet ‘British justice’ – the moralism itself remained, both as a justification and a basis for protest against the ill-treatment of the powerless. White and Whitlam both grew to maturity squarely within this Anglocentric puritan liberalism and, though each man was very critical of aspects of this society, both remained committed to its central cultural ideals.

White was a third-generation child of the wealthy New England squattocracy.\textsuperscript{55} A saying in the area referred to “the Whites, the Wrights and the not-quites”, alluding to the fact that the Whites were the closest thing the region (and Australia) had to royalty.\textsuperscript{56} White’s father, Dick, was one of four brothers who owned grand properties and houses within the Hunter Valley region. As with aristocrats around the world, Patrick grew up believing in the enduring importance of a person’s blood heritage.\textsuperscript{57} In Marr’s summation, White “was a child of the Empire”.\textsuperscript{58} White’s parents “Ruth and Dick were, by instinct, pro-British but Dick was also an Australian chauvinist”.\textsuperscript{59} “This was not a contradiction”, Marr points out: “the two loyalties lay side by side”.\textsuperscript{60} The family and extended family were Church of England, though not in an especially conscientious or fundamentalist way.\textsuperscript{61} They believed strongly in the importance of personal financial rectitude and were opposed to the rise of organised labour. They were emotionally and socially reserved, ‘practical minded’ and hard working, and did not value reading or pleasure for its own sake.\textsuperscript{62} Their houses and gardens were built on English models.\textsuperscript{63}
They played the archetypal ruling-class English games of polo and cricket, and celebrated cultural events such as Christmas and New Year in traditional, ruling-class English style.

But White was culturally both an insider and an outsider of this society. White’s values, according to Marr, were shaped chiefly by his Scottish Presbyterian nurse Lizzie Clark, who always warned against ‘blowing your own trumpet’ and who drummed into him the view that life was about fulfilment, and so also duty, rather than pleasure. In Marr’s account White’s mother Ruth:

wished him success, excitement and all the pleasure his fortune might bring him. He longed for Ruth’s world, but there was also Lizzie’s Scots’ voice in his head, reminding him that pride has its pitfalls, that simplicity is the fundamental virtue, that pleasure must be earned. In Lizzie’s Presbyterian world, the price of all that Ruth wished for the boy was a measure of punishment, pain and suffering.

White himself reflected: “The puritan in me has always wrestled with the sensualist. As a child I felt ashamed of my parents’ affluence. I was aware of a formless misery as well as material distress the other side of the palisade protecting the lives of the favoured few. For that reason I have never been able to enjoy what any ‘normal’ member of my parents’ class considers his right”. Lizzie Clark, White writes, was “a Scottish version of the (puritan) breed”. He recalls that Lizzie’s favourite slogan – ‘never blow your own trumpet’ – is “a warning which has echoed through my life to the present day, when trumpet-blowing has become one of our favourite national pastimes”.

It may however be the case that White emphasised the place of Lizzie Clark in his life partly out of a felt, ongoing resentment against his parents, who he believed failed to give him enough affection and emotional support. Most particularly, White resented having been sent to a brutal boarding school in England: Cheltenham. In any case, in his literary self-portrait White suggests that his values were formed out of his entire familial cultural context, and he pointedly contrasts this culture with that of the 1980s nouveau riche:

I should add that my own family belonged in the category of new-rich when they came to Australia from Somerset as yeomen-farmers generations earlier and were granted great tracts of land which they proceeded to farm, professionally and profitably. As a result of their success they began building Edwardian mansions to replace their simple, early homesteads. Their imported motor-cars were the equivalent of
today’s Mercedes, Jaguars, Porsches, and Ferraris. Austere in many ways, my forebears were also flash in what has become established as the Australian new-rich tradition. The distinction lies in the fact that my father and his brothers were honourable men who would not be divorced from their principles. My dowdy aunts had a moral core which could not be faulted. Even my more pretentious, more elegant mother would never have shed her principles. We were brought up never to blow our trumpets, talk about money, live beyond our means, but to give quietly.  

White was a homosexual, and this, coupled with other factors, such as Lizzie Clark’s teachings against overweening pride, his experience of officially sanctioned brutality at Cheltenham, his mixing with ordinary working-class men and women during the Second World War and his long relationship with the caring and gracious Manoly Lascaris, contributed to his critical attitude towards his own familial culture and Anglocentric puritanism generally. He associated this culture with boredom, small-mindedness, authoritarianism and repression, and came to desire a truly multicultural Australia in which all racial and cultural groups would contribute to a distinctively new Australian culture: “It was a long time”, White writes, “before I was conscious of connecting boredom with undiluted Anglo-Saxon blood”. “Thrashings were quickly forgotten”, White recalled of his childhood, but: “What I could not forgive was my parents’ amusement at their child’s attempts to express his ideas, and their conviction that what I detested was what I would like. Even more, I resented their capacity for boring me, and my mother’s relentless determination to do everything for your own good, which included dumping me in a prison of a school on the other side of the world”. “Sometimes at a distance”, reflects White, “in a theatre or on the opposite side of the street, I might catch sight of my sister chaperoned by a female cousin or a maid. Ashamed of each other the siblings looked away”. The repression associated with his English heritage is further visible in White’s statements that: “Even in the more brazen days of my maturity, English sex shivered and plopped remorsefully like a gas fire on its way out”. Romance was similarly frowned upon: “Mum used to say Dad only married her because there wasn’t another Ebsworth. I expect she was right. Imagination was not part of the White make-up”. And in his memory of being left alone in England: “I was determined to keep my grief within the bounds of that manliness I was being taught to respect, when I would have liked to tear off the rabbitskin glove he was wearing and hold
the sunburnt hand to my cheek. I did nothing. I didn’t cry”.74 Verity Hewitt has written of White’s desire for a multicultural Australia:

White worked from within romantic European traditions in both art and literature. His familiarity with those traditions allowed him to understand their progressions into modernism and abstract art, and to seek to foster their development in a Euro-Australian context. He had a profound desire to see develop an Australian culture that would wrench itself free from overwhelming British influence. He wanted to see it spring from the whole rich European inheritance, in conjunction with the Aboriginal spirit of the land ... In White’s vision for Australian culture, there would be room for the voices of all comers--an expanding fusion and profusion of ever-growing complexity and richness. White did everything he could to foster this development.75

In a letter to his friend Ile Kriger’s niece in Melbourne, White writes: “there are ... a great number of civilised Old Australians who are hoping that the migrants from European countries will bring something of their own cultures with them, so that we can incorporate them into what will some day be a true civilisation of our own”.76

Nevertheless, White also associated England, and more especially London, with civilisation, the best manners and the best aesthetic accomplishments and values. Culturally, he remained notably a member of the dominant British-Australian culture: restrained, removed, high-minded, financially conservative.77 “At heart I am a Londoner”, White wrote to Tom Maschler, managing director of his publishing firm Jonathan Cape, on 20 September 1973.78 Even while campaigning for an Australian republic, White advocated not cutting all ties with Britain: “I am not afraid to confess that I am sentimental to some extent, that I value my British ties, especially to London, the great cultural centre of the world ... It would be damaging, both practically and psychologically to sever the ties with Britain completely”.79 In spite of his flirtations with Judaism, the occult and various forms of protestant Christianity, White wrote in a letter to his cousin Betty Withycombe that he could not become a Catholic: “That is one plunge I could not take. I suppose in my heart I am a bigotted Protestant”.80 “Suffering”, Marr notes significantly,“is a theme that runs through all White’s work”.81

Evidently, the puritan ideal of a selfless vocation or duty continued to underpin White’s world-view. “We must resist the lust for undue wealth, which is what inspires our politicians”, he stated at the inaugural meeting of the Nuclear Disarmament Party in
And in a speech at Latrobe University during one of his last public statements, he suggested:

We must all, in the years to come, work towards a civilisation based on humanity ... Follow the path of humility and humanity, and Australia might develop a civilisation worthy of the name. I believe most people hunger after spirituality, even if that hunger remains in many cases unconscious. If those who dragoon us ignore that longing of the human psyche, they are running a great risk. The sense of real purpose – the life force – could be expelled from a society whose leaders are obsessed by money, muscle and machinery. That society could – quite simply – die.

Marr suggests: “A common thread ran through all the political causes (White) had taken up since he spoke from the truck [against the establishment of an Olympic stadium] in Centennial Park in 1972”. This was “his fear of the power of money. The greed of developers threatened to destroy his city in the early 1970s; greedy and impatient conservatives deposed Whitlam in 1975; greed made Australians kow to Americans and Japanese and British; greed linked governments, miners and manufacturers in the ‘monstrous web’ of the uranium industry which threatened the earth and its peoples”.

Though Whitlam’s personal history is less well documented than that of White, he also came from a well established British-Australian Protestant family and was inculcated with, and espoused throughout his life, the central puritan belief of this culture, that personal and social behaviour must have a selfless moral foundation, that the purpose of life is to gain enlightenment and fulfilment rather than sensual enjoyment. Whitlam’s father Fred, a Commonwealth Crown Solicitor, was a stronger believer in God than were White’s parents. Laurie Oakes and David Solomon describe him as a “somewhat austere Presbyterian whose lifestyle was relatively frugal considering his income and position in the community”. Despite this, Fred encouraged free thinking in his own children. In a 1973 interview with David Frost, Gough Whitlam stated that “I suppose I might have had religious beliefs up until I was eleven or twelve”. And he notes, importantly: “I would have thought that (my father) believed that religious faith underpinned social morality as well, as naturally, as personal morality”. Later in their discussion he says: “I certainly don’t discount the influence that religion has had on my literary and social modes”. He described himself elsewhere as a “fellow traveller” of Christianity.
As with his legendary work ethic, Whitlam’s political philosophy clearly has protean religious antecedents, and in particular the belief in the personal and social necessity of selfless devotion to a vocation: duty. As White persistently praised servants in his novels for their discretion, humility and application to duty, Whitlam praised the same qualities in the Australian bureaucracy. “Whitlam redefines the Labor Party as the party of Deakinite liberalism and the natural home of good public servants like his father”, states Brett. “He was, he said, the first Prime Minister of Australia who had lived in Canberra, ‘the son of a great public servant, among whose colleagues were great public servants’”. According to Brett “this early familial experience gave Whitlam his faith in the constructive and benevolent role of government and in the capability and integrity of the public service”. In the opinion of Gough’s sister Freda: “Coming from a home like ours, we would have had to go into some sort of service to the community. Gough doesn’t go to church every Sunday, but he is completely motivated by our religious background; he would not accept that, but it is true”. Freda also states that “in our home” there was “of course ... never any drink. We are all very puritanical, but it wasn’t obviously so. It was the way we lived”.

According to Oakes, Fred Whitlam had a strong sense of duty but was also capable of independent thought and action: “a model, impartial, and reticent public servant who nevertheless led a community revolt against the imposition of a special hospital tax on Canberra residents in 1933”. Fred was also “a generous helper of the underprivileged whose donations to churches and charities were so large that his public service colleagues wrongly assumed that he had an independent income”. The family atmosphere was nothing if not high-minded:

Fred Whitlam provided for his children an environment in which they were surrounded by books, encouraged to study, and had few distractions – not even a radio. Slang terms were banned. Idle chatter was frowned upon, and family conversation centred on such serious matters as literature, history and current affairs. When Gough and Freda were very young, even fairy tales were forbidden – bedtime reading came from the Greek and Roman myths.

A comparison with White’s own household comes to mind. Patrick never allowed a television in the house. And though there was lots of gossip, serious subjects had to be
treated absolutely seriously. According to Oakes: “Gough Whitlam inherited his wit and sense of humour from his mother, Martha, but his attitudes, social concern, thirst for knowledge, cleverness with words, and application to work came from his dour, scholarly father”. Interestingly, where White feared his own ‘priggishness’, Whitlam was described in somewhat priggish terms by his school mates, as “pedantic, thorough, impudently witty, extremely well-read, usually defensive and withdrawn”. Whitlam was also reportedly teased at school for being weak in mathematics, suggesting that like White his central interest was with questions of cultural and social values. And like White, Whitlam was in his younger years a shy person, very conscious of the imperative of not blowing one’s own trumpet. Where White would have liked to be an actor if, he felt, he had not been made so shy by his Anglo-Saxon cultural heritage, Whitlam did begin to overcome his shyness at school through acting.

Of course Whitlam, like White, was no Anglophile. Each man explicitly criticised Australia’s enduring political subservience to Britain, and was an avowed Australian nationalist, though of a cosmopolitan and multiculturalist kind (they saw no conflict between their nationalism and their internationalism, wanting Australia to engage with the world, but on its own terms). Nevertheless, both men remained committed to a distinctively puritan cultural ideal – that the achievement of wealth and power cannot be an end in itself but only a by-product of a vocation – that in the Australian context emanated from and was sustained by groups of people who were culturally attached to Britain. Those influenced by this culture commonly contrasted it with the materialist, masculinist, conformist folk culture of Australian mateship, on the one hand, and the radically individualist and materialist American forms of puritanism on the other, in which for various historical and religious reasons a less firm distinction between personal gain and moral stature was generally drawn.

**Attitudes Towards US and Working-class Australian Cultures**

Both White and Whitlam regard ‘ordinary’ Australians – those who subscribe to the dominant, essentially working-class culture of conformist mateship – in paternal terms, as essentially childlike and needing instruction. White, in particular, was disdainful towards and exasperated by Australian conformity. As he wrote of the Kerr coup: “The childlike
mentality of so many Australians was easily terrified by British, American, and Liberal-controlled media propaganda into thinking they had escaped losing their all through reforms the Whitlam government was introducing. This supposedly sophisticated country is still, alas, a colonial sheep-run”. 106 “Australians of all classes, levels of education, of the best intentions and integrity”, White wrote, “are a prey to their native innocence. Even a man of Whitlam’s intellect, wit, and capacity for leadership was brought down by precisely this strain of Australian innocence”. 107

For White, artists in Australia “have to elbow their way against the surge of the colonial sheep race”. 108 Australians’ consumerism and their liking for popular cultural forms exacerbates, in White’s mind, their immaturity. In 1980 he states: “Quite often when I talk to children, even adults, they look at me in blank surprise because I don’t trot out the half-a-dozen telly cliches – for the most part gifts from our American overlords – with which so many Australians communicate today”. 109 In 1984 White says: “Over the years I have learnt to appreciate the worth of simple Australians who sincerely love their country, though in recent times this love is deflected into wrong channels by politicians and manipulators of moral values, jingle writers, the eternal flag wingers and sports promoters”. 110 And in 1987 he spells out this point again: “A large proportion of grown Australians remain children at heart – I see them as kidults. That’s why they’re so easily deceived by politicians, developers, organisers of festivals, and that is why they fail to dig the real purpose of a giant circus like the (bicentennary)”. 111

Australians, like babies, want immediate gratification, and so are easily fooled and / or bought off by the manipulative. They must learn to endure suffering so as to properly grow up: “Australians are not prepared for anguish. I don’t mean only in the sense of personal bereavement, but in the true spiritual sense, when we feel that God may have forsaken the world”. 112 A nation in the true sense isn’t born of self-congratulation and the accumulation of often ill-gotten and unequally distributed wealth”, White proclaims. Rather: “I suppose I’ll be condemned as a miserable Jeremiah if I say it is born of suffering. Australians have suffered in the past, which they tend to forget now ... Even an occasion commemorating the horrors of Hiroshima has to be turned into a festival of sorts, with entertainers hired, often at great expense, to keep the kidult mourners amused”. 113 In contrast, White feels himself to have been “born old”. 114
Whitlam expressed considerable compassion for people in poverty, and a sophisticated understanding of its structural causes in modern society:

People are poverty-stricken when their income, even if adequate for survival, falls markedly behind that of the community. They cannot have what the larger community regards as the minimum necessary for decency. They cannot wholly escape, therefore, the judgement of the larger community that they are indecent. They are degraded for, in the literal sense, they live outside the grades or categories which the community regards as acceptable. Poverty then is more than the product of inadequate earnings, it is the product of community values.\textsuperscript{115}

But as a social democrat, Whitlam’s chief concern was that the working class be given the material and educational means of overcoming their disadvantage, rather than radicalised as a means of gaining economic, political and cultural autonomy. Clearly, both White and Whitlam have a strong sense of\textit{noblesse oblige} and both have an Arnoldian, Modernist conception of culture as something like a secular religion. White in particular is aware that, as Terry Eagleton argues, “culture is fatally enfeebled once it comes adrift from its roots in religion”.\textsuperscript{116} Neither he nor Whitlam would have entertained the idea that working-class art and culture could be as equally ‘great’ as the art and culture of the Western canon.\textsuperscript{117}

During the 1960s, however, White came to the view that the central obstacle to the social achievement of his central cultural ideals came not from within Australia but from the United States. From the late 1950s, even before his conscious politicisation, White becomes increasingly disturbed by the political, social and cultural trends he sees around him and, in particular, by the domination of narrow individualism, materialism and consumerism over moral and aesthetic considerations. White comes to see the USA as the epitome and symbol of these trends. In 1958 he writes to his English cousin Peggy Garland:

It is really the Jews of that (cosmopolitan, intellectual) type who make life in the States bearable. Otherwise, it is a horrifying kind of sub-civilisation, full of sudden gusts of fascism. The routine of living has been made so easy that the average person has lost touch with life, its primary forms and substances. I shall be glad to get out of it, even more glad that I am Australian.\textsuperscript{118}
White describes the US variously as decadent, uncultured, (in the sense of being unlearned and insensitive), materialistic, hedonistic, immoral, amoral, ideological (in the negative sense of the word), asocial and, above all, as corrupted by money. Importantly, White sees the dominance of material values and greed as corrupting human relations, destroying the selfless form of love that he always regarded as the most true form.\footnote{119}

Perhaps the best encapsulation of White’s view of the US appears in an account of a visit to Greece he made with his partner Manoly Lascaris:

> At Tripolis, the prototype of Greek provincial towns ... While we were standing on a boardwalk above the sadly humiliated waters of that classic inlet, I glanced down, and there amongst the rubbish was a plastic spoon stamped with the word AMERICA ... Not only on a plastic spoon casually dropped beside the Saronic Gulf, AMERICA is writ large across its victim. It is tattooed into the body of a goddess turned prostitute, by poverty, materialism, and international politics.\footnote{120}

Tripolis is the original model of Greek provincial towns, suggesting that its degradation is particularly telling and sad. The ‘classic inlet’ now containing ‘sadly humiliated waters’ suggests the lost grandeur of a greater civilisation and a better age. This civilisation is contrasted with the cultural insignificance of a plastic spoon, along with other ‘rubbish’; America’s ‘gift’ to this society. The spoon has been ‘casually’ dropped, indicating the ignorance of those partaking in the destruction of this great civilisation. The capitalised ‘America’ conveys White’s sense of this nation’s power and of the inexorable nature of its domination, as well as of the crass ‘in your face’ quality of its culture. America cannot be ignored, even here in Western civilisation’s classical home. America has not only victimised Greece, personified in the figure of a goddess, it has coarsely displayed its name across the victim’s body, like a form of graffiti, again suggesting philistinism and ignorant, childlike triumphalism. Greece has been turned into a degraded, tattooed prostitute, suggesting that her ‘fall’, in the face of the greedy, ignorant, selfish and self-serving America, is moral as well as aesthetic. America’s ‘victory’ is plainly a hollow one.

A culture of naked materialist self-interest is for White, as he makes clear in this 1984 ‘Hiroshima Day’ address, a culture of unreality and gullibility:

> What is reality? We may ask. Something different for everyone. Look at Reagan, the straw cowboy, and his buddy, Bush, flexing their muscles on
the election trail, in their Texas hats, flanked by a couple of busty starlets. Such a set-up must mean reality for many American electors or it couldn’t be practised so successfully. War, I feel, must be a celluloid adventure, a series of clips from Gone with the Wind or Apocalypse Now, for those who have not experienced it on their own soil, or anyways since away back in history.121

“At this moment”, White suggests later that year, “there is a tensely unreal atmosphere in the Western world ... in Hawke’s Australia – in Reagan’s Disneyland”.122 In 1986 he adds: “Reagan seems to me a perfect example of somebody unable to imagine the real”.123 Elsewhere White expands on his dissatisfaction with American cultural domination:

Never were there such victims of progress as contemporary Greeks. Peasants who sold their fields in Thessaly and Thrace live like battery fowls on their steel and concrete balconies or expose themselves to television in the cells behind, in every interior the same box flickering the same message. They tell themselves they are happy. They are prosperous, at least for the time being, stuffed with macaroni, fried potatoes, and barbecued meat. Livery and neurotic. The human contacts of village life are of the past, along with those tough, golden, classic hens scratching freely amongst the dust and stones.124

And he writes of Rhodes being “rotted by film stars and tourism”.125 Of a proposal to turn his novel Voss into a film, White warns: “I would not want to see the book turned into some American monstrosity with Ava Gardner and Gregory Peck”.126 During one of his numerous visits to the US, in 1968, he reports in a letter to his New York agent John Cushman: “I haven’t heard such fascist talk since Germany before the War”.127

White repeatedly states his fear that Australia will become another United States, in which cultural considerations, upon which beauty depends, will be wholly subject to materialistic greed and the cultural relativism of the market. “As we raced through the ’Sixties into the ’Seventies”, he writes, “the social climate changed: ladies of a higher social level began cooking for their equals, their inferiors too, if the money was there. Money became everything, vulgarity chic, the crooks got off provided they were rich enough. Knighthoods could be bought more easily than ever”.128 As he wrote, in what Marr terms “magisterial” letters to the Sydney Morning Herald, White “feared Australia
becoming a colony of the United States”. Speaking at the 1972 Sydney Town Hall protest against the proposed Olympic stadium, he asks:

What, I wonder, constitutes this progress we are urged to believe in? Perhaps the vision of some American city of the 1930s when for most other countries of the world the United States was the symbol of material success. But what of today? As our well-travelled politicians are driven round Manhattan or Chicago are none of them aware of the neuroses and despair, the dirt and violence lurking in these ever-crowded concrete warrens? If our travelled politicians are not aware, many thinking Americans would be prepared to give warning. In fact, some of these thinking Americans have migrated to Australia, to escape from what we now seem to be building up for ourselves in imitation of America.

In 1973 White asserts: “Civilisation is not a matter of money and concrete. (Look at what’s become of the United States!) civilisation, as I see it, depends on spirit – human beings – human values”. “We in this Lucky Country are inveterate trumpet-blowers”, White diagnoses in his 1974 Australian of the Year acceptance speech, “and what I fear for us is that, if we don’t take care, we shall end up in the late Twentieth Century as kid brother of the original Lucky Country, the United States”. In a 1984 speech in New Zealand White suggests: “We, more than you, are plagued by an establishment which wears two faces, which adopts a pragmatic attitude, to use a fashionable and ultimately meaningless word. Of course it really means that we must lick the arses of our American overlords”. And in 1988 White saw Australia’s flashy, mindless self-promotion as exemplary of the increasing dominance of American values within Australia: “This frame of mind was rife in the US in the 1930s. And now it has caught on in Oz as we become increasingly Americanised”.

This antipathy towards what he sees as the uncultured capitalism of the USA arises chiefly out of White’s British-Australian cultural context. As Marr sets out:

This suspicion of America was one of the few clear political convictions he absorbed from his parents and it turned out to be important. At Lulworth the decline of Britain was felt as a blow to the family of which they were part. America was certainly friendly, but this was the rise of another empire and another family to which rich Australia had little connection. The Whites and their friends voiced something of this anxiety in the amused distaste they had for American vulgarity, but Patrick could also remember his parents in the early 1930s pressing on people copies of a tract called Honour or Dollars which argued the need for Britain to be
forgiven the immense war debts it owed the United States. This was the Victor Whites’ only political enthusiasm and their son was impressed. Thirty-five years later the transformation of this private conservative into a public radical began with his initially cautious and later vociferous disapproval of America’s role in Vietnam.¹³⁵

One of White’s earliest memories is of his mother telling off his father for “chewing a wad of the disgusting new American gum”.¹³⁶ “Of the American novelists”, states White, “the people I like are Bellow and Updike, who are fairly detached”; in other words, those who are culturally most like the English.¹³⁷ After initially feeling tempted to join the crowds in Sydney welcoming the American evangelist Billy Graham, White heard Graham’s Baptist rhetoric on the radio and was glad he didn’t. Graham’s emotional, flashy, self-righteous style helped White to define his own faith.¹³⁸

This is not to say that White is pathologically anti-American, or unable to appreciate Americans or accept the value of some elements of US culture. Manoly’s mother was American. During his first visit to the US in 1939 White had significant personal relationships with ‘Spud’ Johson and Joe Rankin (to whom White dedicated The Living and the Dead [1962]). While writing this novel in Rankin’s apartment, White thought himself “more or less an adopted American”, even while finding New York “lacking in a dimension, and the people are without roots”.¹³⁹ Ben Huebsch, the publisher at Viking in New York, was in a professional sense at least the most important single supporter in White’s literary career. His respectful and accommodating attitude to White’s literary creativity was plainly evidence of a person of similar philosophy to White. According to Marr, for example, Huebsch “was not deterred by length. The manuscripts of authors like White were not to be cut. He put no pressure on authors to be commercial, and was happy for the Viking Press to carry unprofitable writers in whom he had faith”.¹⁴⁰ White “could not have hoped for a better reception” to the 1939 Viking edition of Happy Valley, published the week France fell. “His style, which had been greeted with scepticism in London and hostility in Australia, was very much to taste in America”.¹⁴¹ When White delivered the finished typescript of The Living and the Dead to his agent, Huebsch accepted the book while the London publisher rejected it.¹⁴² “So a pattern was set for the next fifteen years”, explains Marr: “immediate acceptance of White’s work in New York and a struggle to find a publisher in London”.¹⁴³ In London
during the war, White wrote home saying he didn’t think he could live in Europe any more, that it would have to be the States or Australia. White’s *The Tree of Man*, which thrilled his American publishers, was rejected by some twenty London publishers. Frank Morley of the London firm Eyre & Spottiswoode was persuaded to take the book, while visiting New York, by Huebsch. White later stated with relief: “It is the first time I have been able to relax with an English publisher as I have from the beginning with Ben Huebsch”. After *The Tree of Man* won rave reviews in the US and only lukewarm praise in Britain and Australia, White remarked: “If it hadn’t been for the Americans I would have felt like putting my head in a gas oven”. The US royalties White received from *The Tree of Man* enabled him and Manoly to purchase a new Rover. When White held a party for Yevgeny Yevtushenko, the star of the 1966 Adelaide Festival, Marr recounts: “Yevtushenko arrived with his ‘interpreter’ Oxana Krugerskaya and a local Communist novelist, Frank Hardy, whom White could never bear”. Later Yevtushenko launched into what White described as “an embarrassing tirade of hate” against America. White reportedly “sat grim and unflinching as the poet and his translator pursued the ‘operative duet-cum-ballet’. The Russian hoped that eventually ‘We will all be working for all people, the whole world.’ There was no applause. White left for the kitchen clutching his head”.

But White felt “out of love” with the US by 1971, following a drop off in the sales of his works and the increasingly harsh critical reception that greeted them there. He wrote: “Nowhere does one see a soul who might share one’s thoughts and opinions. I can see why my books don’t sell in the States: what is surprising is that any book should sell”. By that time White delayed sending his novel manuscripts to his US publisher so that they would be reviewed in London first, where they were now more likely to be favourably received.

As discussed in the previous chapter, in the mid-1960s many people believed that the dominant, Anglocentric liberal culture of Australia was being replaced by a more radically individualist American culture, most visible in unabashed consumerism. This is recognised by Frank Moorhouse, implicitly though clearly, in his germinal collection of interconnected short stories, *The Americans, Baby* (1972). Notably, Moorhouse’s characters here, influenced by a range of more worldly Americans, are new in Australian
literature in the extent to which they are preoccupied with immediately satisfying basic, physical and material needs and wants: for sex, alcohol and drugs in particular. Moorhouse’s characters want only physical satisfaction and sensual gratification, rather than any form of spiritual transcendence, wisdom, or deep emotional fulfilment. White on the other hand believes that where ideals are replaced by material greed, and ethical and aesthetic distinctions evaporate, life becomes profoundly meaningless and unreal, human relations are degraded. He insists that a state of illumination or transcendence can only be obtained through an acceptance of suffering, which White equates with full maturity.

As a political leader and public figure Whitlam’s practical capacity to comment on the cultures of foreign nations is limited, and it seems clear that he was much more positive towards American culture as a whole than was White, but he does observe that the central obstacle to his political and other public aims emanated from the policies of the United States. As he states:

What destroyed [Lyndon Johnson’s] concept of the Great Society, with all the hopes it held for the city dwellers, the poor, the old, the sick and the black of the US, was not the over-ambitiousness or expensiveness of its social programs but the cost of the war in Vietnam. The American liberals, ‘the best and the brightest’, believed they could have both the Great Society in America and victory in Vietnam. Even the resources of the US proved not to be limitless and the Great Society became yet another of the casualties of Vietnam. Its baleful effects did not end with the collapse of the ideal of the Great Society under Johnson. The catastrophe of the war put an end to the two decades of virtually uninterrupted growth and prosperity enjoyed by the West.153

**White’s Cultural Contribution to Whitlam’s Political Project: The Novels of the Period**

The cultural origins of White’s politics and the political effects of his major cultural products, his novels, are questions that have rarely been given extended scholarly consideration. Yet, in both their content and form, the three novels White produced in the period between his conscious politicisation in the mid-1960s (in the context of his opposition to the American and Australian war in Vietnam)154 and the defeat of the Whitlam government in 1975 (an event marking the end of his time of political hope), give evidence of White’s enduring commitment to a politics grounded in the ideals of his definitively Anglo-Australian puritanism. Each novel is an affirmation of the value and
importance of selflessness, suffering and devotion to a vocation: through this serious and
earnest performance of duty, it is revealed, an otherwise unobtainable, profound spiritual
vision, illumination or transcendence, and a deep connection with humanity that is the
real purpose of life, is granted. The main characters of all three novels are explicitly
English-Australians, suggesting White’s central identification with this cultural grouping
and his belief that this group had special cultural qualities and responsibilities. Perhaps
most interestingly, however, these three novels also reveal White’s increasing concern
with the impact of American trends on Australian culture. The Solid Mandala constitutes
a critique of British-Australian puritan hypocrisy. The Vivisector is above all a critique of
small-minded Australian nationalism, the conformist culture of mateship, though
American cultural influences are (unflatteringly) visible. The Eye of the Storm is a
critique of selfish individualism and materialism, characteristics epitomised in the novel
by an explicitly Americanised character: Doctor Gidley. These ‘metaphysical’ novels do,
at the spiritual or emotional level of culture, make a tangible contribution to the
advancement of White’s and Whitlam’s political values.

In The Solid Mandala the core puritan theme is advanced via the story of Waldo
Brown. Although the novel is ostensibly structured as a mandala (a symbol of the unity of
opposites like the Chinese ying and yang), with brief introductory and closing chapters
encasing one extended chapter each on Waldo and his twin brother Arthur, the Waldo
chapter is far longer – 191 pages to Arthur’s seventy-nine – suggesting White’s central
thematic preoccupation (and his identification) with this character. Waldo’s tragedy is
that he is unable to become a fully developed human being because he is too deeply
neurotic and concerned with what others – his society – may think. He desires a vocation,
that of the artist, but desires it for the wrong reasons. He wants to receive social
acclamation and kudos rather than to find deep truth and enlightenment. Waldo’s lack of
humility and his related attachment to narrow, human rationalism and conventional
sexual morality, keeps him from the profound understanding upon which, it is made
clear, true artistic vision depends. As a result his anger, resentment and self-loathing
builds to the point where it directly or indirectly destroys him.

In The Vivisector the central puritan message is told through the story of Hurtle
Duffield. Unlike Waldo Brown, Hurtle Duffield does possess an artist’s vocation, and he
accepts the personal cost of this from the earliest age. Throughout the novel it is made clear that Duffield is profoundly alone, that he has no real family: “‘I think you’re an artist, aren’t you?’”, Rhoda Courtney asks Duffield, and explains: “‘What I meant was sans famille.’” (516) As a young boy his parents give him up for adoption, suggesting immediately White’s view that the artist’s unique qualities affect and to an extent transcend all of his or her human relationships (importantly, Hurtle is fundamentally disconnected from society by a commercial transaction: the reduction of human to market value). Duffield suffers throughout his life, both in wrestling to find the ultimate artistic vision and in being constantly misunderstood by people around him. Other characters are often horrified, if also fascinated, by the truth revealed to them in Duffield’s art: “‘You, Hurtle, were born with a knife in your hand. No’, [his step-mother] corrected herself, ‘in your eye’”. (146) People generally are shown to be too frightened or vain to properly question themselves and their world, as good puritans must do. In a cultural sense Duffield is a vivisector, though in performing this function, White reveals, he is only acting as a medium for a greater power. On one level, as Marr suggests, “the novel is a writer’s profound exercise in self-justification”. Since Duffield does stay the course with his vocation and stare honestly into the metaphysical abyss, he does achieve, at the time of his death, a profound sense of accomplishment and spiritual joy, certainly seeing the transcendent realm:

He was mixing the never-yet-attainable blue. He pursed is lips to repeat the syllables which were being dictated: N–D–G–O ... All his life he had been reaching towards this vertiginous blue without truly visualising ... Now he was again acknowledging with all the strength of his live hand the otherwise unnameable I–N–D–I–G–O ... Too tired too end-less obvi indiggod. (616–617)

Duffield has always associated the colour indigo with the divine. As Havelock Ellis pointed out in his 1896 analysis of colour in poetry, the blue colours of the sky and sea “naturally symbolise ... ideas of infinity and depth”. In Duffield’s moment of fatal illumination he manages to produce the perfect indigo and so merges with ultimate being, wisdom, vision, becoming one with the perfect colour and the perfect being. As William Scheick points out, ‘indigo’ is an anagram of ‘God-in-I’. Scheick suggests that ‘indiggod’ conveys the idea of the godlike individual’s returning into God, having grown
tired at last of human consciousness. It could be argued that this is White’s most optimistic novel, and it is perhaps no coincidence that it was published in the period leading up to the election of the Whitlam government.

The puritan theme of *The Eye of the Storm* is expressed in the experience of the central characters Basil Hunter, Dorothy de Lascabanes (née Hunter) and their mother Elizabeth Hunter. In order to achieve emotional fulfilment and metaphysical enlightenment these three must develop a ‘pure’ or selfless love for each other, one that is neither domineering (as Elizabeth’s love has been) nor self-serving (as has been the children’s love for their mother). Like Waldo Brown these characters are vaguely aware of their profound psychological and spiritual needs but are only partially successful in meeting these. Basil and Dorothy are siblings who return home from London and Paris respectively in order to see their powerful and manipulative mother before she dies. Ostensibly their mission is to see that she is cared for in the period leading up to her death, but Basil and Dorothy also have hidden, partly repressed motives, namely to make sure that they get their hands on an acceptable share of their inheritance, that will only come to them upon Elizabeth’s death. There are parallels in the story with Shakespeare’s examination of filial love, duty and resentment in *King Lear* and there are allusions to this play throughout the novel. While they would like to be like Cordelia and Edgar, in the end Basil and Dorothy more closely resemble Goneril, Regan and Edmund. White resented his own mother’s economic power over him and the psychological pressure she placed on him, and was unable to escape the guilty feeling that he may have wished her to die. The novel’s title refers in a literal sense to Elizabeth’s moment of illumination during the eye of a storm on Brumby Island, but beyond this is also intended to stand as a metonym for moments of numinous vision, when temporal earthly concerns drop away and a glimpse is obtained of the eternal and universal.

These moments of profound stillness form the dramatic climax of all of White’s novels following his personal religious conversion during his experience of such a moment at his property in 1951. At these moments of epiphany, in which “the mind moves upon silence”, as Yeats put it in his poem ‘The Long Legged Fly’, the great dualisms, binaries, or contraries of human consciousness and reality are resolved. The individual merges with the world around her, gaining a sense of the ultimate unity of
everything and everybody, and thus of complete spiritual and emotional fulfilment. As Marr summarises, “The Eye of the Storm follows the fundamental plot of all the books White wrote since falling in the storm at Castle Hill: the erratic, often unconscious search for God”.

In each of these novels, then, the central theme is the affirmation of White’s core, Anglocentric puritan cultural values, and these values are also affirmed obliquely via the form of these novels. As White admitted, he did not at this time place any value in the creation of plot. He was concerned instead with the creation and development of characters. The stories advance through a series of often apparently insignificant or mundane incidents that, it is intimated, have a deep conscious or unconscious impact on the characters. The effect of this, throughout the novels, is to skilfully and subtly suggest the presence of generally unrecognised forces beneath ordinary human interaction, and the possibility that this ordinary interaction might be part of a greater cosmological reality and have repercussions beyond ordinary understanding. The three novels are long and ‘difficult’: filled with complex sentence structure, allusion, challenging ideas and a confronting, unconventional aesthetic. The reader is rarely ‘delighted’ by what she finds in these works, but is always aware of a deep ‘instruction’ being revealed (to evoke Chaucer’s translation of Boethius’s classic definition of the function of literature). White often refers to works of Literature in the novels, as though encouraging his readers to search for the key to his work in other great texts. Grasping the ‘meaning’ of these novels requires application, work: a willingness to consider aesthetic and moral issues at length, to make the development of one’s own values a central part of one’s life. Just as White argues in all three of these novels against the value of ‘immediate sensual gratification’, the form of these novels implicitly encourages notions of hard work and serious moral commitment. None of these novels could be considered light entertainment.

We learn in the brief, prefatory chapter of The Solid Mandala that Waldo Brown and his twin brother Arthur: “‘come out from Home,’ Mrs Poulter said, ‘when the boys were only bits of kids.’ Mrs Dun was partly pacified. ‘All these foreigners,’ she said, ‘we are letting in nowadays. I admit the English is different.’” (15) The Brown family are English, more educated than their neighbours, and have pretensions to cultural sophistication (the father, George Brown, wishes to build a classical-style pediment on
the family house, for example). They are on the outer, socially, because of this. Both parents have strong values: “When she was ill, and fanciful, and old, Anne Brown, born a Quantrell, said to her sons absently: ‘It was for his principles, I suppose. And kindness. Poor George, he was too kind. It left him too open to attack”’. (80) Like Whitlam, the Brown brothers’ parents were members of the Fabian society. (145) And the mother, Anne Quantrell, is of aristocratic heritage.169

Hurtle Duffield, whom White makes a child of working-class parents in order to suggest the ‘naturalness’ of the artist-type and to avoid the perception that a sterile, puritan, Anglo-Saxon cultural environment could induce a creative genius, is nevertheless a child of English working-class parents:

During break Tom Sullivan from Cox Street started making up to Ossie, whispering and laughing behind his hand. Ossie would have liked to laugh back if his long dopy face had dared.

‘What was Tommo telling you?’

‘Nothing,’ said Os.

‘It was too long to be nothing. Go on, what was it?’ Ossie Flood’s skin turned green.

‘Tell, or I’ll kick you in the guts.’

This had always worked in Cox Street. And Ossie Flood began to tell. His biggest teeth were grooved and green. He told spitting excited frightened he said how Tommo Sullivan said Hurt Duffield was the son of a no-hope pommy bottle-o down their street, who carried around in an old cigar box a pedigree like he was a racehorse.

Going down the steps after break Hurtle got up against Tommo Sullivan to tell him he was the biggest turd ever dropped from an Irish arse. He banged Tommo’s head once or twice against the wall. Though Tommo was bigger, it came easy. (40)

From his adopted (English-Australian) parents Hurtle learns the importance of duty, and when he comes to teach his kindred spirit Kathy Volkov (significantly a child of European rather than ‘ordinary’ Australian heritage) about the process of artistic creation, it is a puritan message he feels the need to convey: “She hadn’t suffered enough: because pity was not yet one of her personal needs, she hadn’t bothered to understand, let alone confer it”. (432) More than being a child of English parents, Hurtle is the child of English parents with a noble heritage. His grandfather was an educated gentleman. As with Tobias Smollett’s *Humphrey Clinker* (1771), the ostensibly democratic storyline of a poverty-stricken boy ‘making good’ is undermined by the revelation of noble birth (the
implication could be that this heritage gives Hurtle a more noble sensibility than is allowed others of less fortunate parentage).

Elizabeth Hunter and her two children are explicitly English-Australians, and the inheritors of traditional, Anglocentric ruling-class Australian culture. They are cultivated, detached, reserved, aware of the importance of paying and receiving respect. At Elizabeth’s funeral, for example: “There were no spectacular outbreaks of grief, only the hint of a soggy patch here and there in the broken rows. Elizabeth Hunter’s own sense of style would not have encouraged emotional excess”. (558) This focus on English-Australian characters in this and White’s two previous novels suggests that White is most concerned with the fate of this community, and perhaps also implies a conscious or unconscious belief that the people of this community have the greatest role to play in the continuing development of Australian culture.\textsuperscript{170}

The central constraint on Waldo Brown’s achievement of spiritual transcendence is a degraded, ‘worldly’, self-serving or pharisaical form of puritanism that White identifies in Waldo’s society and that Waldo has internalised. Waldo has all of the worst features of Anglo-Australian puritanical culture and none of its redeeming qualities. He is narrowly rationalistic (“Facts are facts. And Waldo Brown respected facts as much as he respected habit”); (70) deeply repressed, sexually and emotionally (“Waldo was so horrified he might have expressed his feelings”); (111) jealous (“‘Waldo’, [Arthur] told her [Dulcie], ‘is just about the jealousest thing you’ll find’”); (151) fearfully desirous of social respectability and acceptance (“Waldo”, states White’s narrator, might have loved [his library workmate Wally], if that truth had been admitted”); (128) while lacking any genuine care for others (“Occasionally, in passing, after returning the scones to the table, he would very carefully brush the crumbs which had fallen on Arthur’s knees, with a candid though unostentatious charity which moved the observer – as well as the performer”); (75–76) filled with loathing towards the physical and especially the grossly physical (“Waldo could not bear to listen to Arthur breathing the way he breathed”); (41) and unable to cope with the unknowable, infinite or numinous (“Waldo was astonished, then horrified, at the strangeness of it”). (152) Waldo is filled with resentment and hate and, as if it is not enough for him to be physically stunted, even the dog he comes to own
(as a means of spiting his brother) is also a runt. Waldo is committed to the performance of duty, but only to free himself from guilt and gain social acceptance.

Yet Waldo is not honestly searching for truth or especially willing to examine his own limitations before or after passing judgement on others: more positive qualities that often (as in the case of White) accompany rigid puritanism. Waldo is best described as a ‘prig’: a “conceited didactic person ... tiresomely precise, straitlaced, over-conscious of moral superiority”. In White’s literary self-portrait it emerges that this priggishness is what he most fears becoming. Priggishness is the natural flaw of the person with high moral standards: the puritan. Marr writes that ‘Waldo’ was reportedly based on a real character White had known at Cheltenham, but apparently ‘Waldo’ was also at one time a nickname of White. “I see the Brown brothers as my two halves”, White wrote, “Waldo is myself at my coldest and worst”. White’s primary target of criticism in the novel is a lived culture of small-minded, hypocritical, Anglo-Australian puritanism, though at the same time he endorses the ideals of this culture. For White, as for the original Puritans, spiritual transcendence paradoxically requires a full acceptance of the fundamental impurity of the individual and the world. White and his familial forebears believed the proper eschewal of selfishness required the performance of social duty.

Arthur, Waldo’s twin, his Other both literally and metaphorically, is totally uncaring of social conventions, mores, expectations and rewards. Although very good at maths, Arthur wishes only to work for the local shopkeeper Mr Allwright. Where Waldo is physically small and weak, Arthur is big, strong and good looking. He has a close friendship with their neighbour Mrs Poulter and is oblivious to people’s rumour-mongering. He is completely relaxed and unselfconscious around all people, and oversteps conventional barriers of decorum in expressing his emotions, most obviously (and infuriatingly for Waldo) in his relationship with the Feinsteins (Waldo believes at one time that he loves Dulcie Feinstein). Arthur’s vocation – making bread – is an appropriately simple and profound task with obvious biblical precedents and allusions. (Waldo, naturally, resents the fact that Arthur has a vocation.) Through the ‘true’ nature of his spirit Arthur grasps the world more deeply than Waldo and is able to create more powerful art, including a poem that, near the end of his life, Waldo discovers. In its power, the poem destroys Waldo’s illusions of his own superiority over Arthur, and of
the superiority of his own way of thinking. The poem, for Waldo, is a “disgusting blood myth”, (213) the visceral and deeply symbolic nature of blood being abhorrent for the repressed and rationalist Waldo. Allusions to Christ appear in descriptions of Arthur throughout the novel. After Arthur has killed Waldo for having destroyed his poem, for example, we hear via a panicked Mrs Poulter: “And He released His hands from the nails. And fell down, in a thwack of canvas, a cloud of dust. It was not Arthur. Arthur would never ever of done that. He was not God. Arthur was a man”. (303) And later: “‘This man would be my saint,’ she said, ‘if we could still believe in saints. Nowadays,’ she said, ‘we’ve only men to believe in. I believe in this man.’” (314)

Waldo is, we learn from early in the novel, determined to produce a great work of literary art: “‘Oh,’ cried Waldo Brown in anguish”, while going on one of the long walks that he as an old man takes with his brother, in the hope, it is hinted, that Arthur’s heart might give out, “‘but I have not expressed half of what is in me to express!’”. (30) As a young man he decided he “would write a play, something quite different, when he had thought of one”. (40) People “did not grasp the extent of his need to express some thing. Otherwise how could he truly say: I exist”. (82) “‘What I really want to do’”, he confides as a teenager to Dulcie Feinstein, a young woman he meets at a party, “‘is write’ ... ‘What are you going to write,’ she said, ‘do you think it will be novels?’ ‘I haven’t decided yet,’ he said, ‘what,’ he said, ‘what form it’ll take. Sometimes I think novels, sometimes plays. It might even be some kind of philosophical work.’” (93) Afterwards he wishes “he could have conceived a poem. He had not yet, but would – it was something he had kept even from himself”. (110) In later life Waldo “has a box of manuscripts clippings letters of appreciation”, (117) but “he had not produced what you might call a substantial body of work”. (117) He did not allow this to consciously bother him, since he believed that art was his vocation and that it could only be a matter of time before he produced something great: “He was only marking time, and would create the work of art he was intended to create”. (146) In the end Waldo is reduced to copying others’ poetry, and pretending to himself that it is his: “‘Tennyson,’ he said”, when Arthur finds a Tennyson poem and describes it as “‘the one you copied out’” – “‘is, I suppose, everybody’s property. Tennyson,’ he added, ‘wrote so much he must have had difficulty, in the end, remembering what he had written’”. (195)
But Waldo has glimpses of the transcendent reality with which he hopes to connect through his art: “He went so far as to begin a [bad] poem which he hoped might be to some extent expressive of the nobler rage. He wrote:

Oh to die where poppies shed their blood
On youths grown faceless in the mud
For Freedom’s effigy to rear it’s head...

(As an old man Waldo Brown discovered these lines amongst his papers, and got a thrill, the ‘genuine frisson’ as it had come to be called. It was a pity he hadn’t finished the thing ... ).” (129–130) Later: “Human relationships, particularly the enduring ones, or those which we are forced to endure, are confusingly marbled in appearance, Waldo Brown realised, and noted in a notebook”. (167) Not reflecting on this insight, Waldo fails to see White’s point that the mandala, symbolised in this novel by the marbles or taws that Arthur gives to those in emotional or spiritual need, provides a key to human fulfilment or to what Carl Jung termed ‘individuation’. And when briefly Waldo gave in to his deeply suppressed but equally powerful urge to put on an old dress of his mother’s (being “obsessed by it. Possessed” [193]), “when he was finally and fully arranged, bony, palpitating, plucked”, he attained “a remarkable increase in vision”. (193) The fact that Waldo’s creativity is stifled by his suppression of his feminine and intuitive sides is further suggested by the title of the novel he begins (but of course doesn’t finish): ‘Tiresius a Youngish Man’. (173) White believed intuition was a feminine quality, and that the strength of his own feminine feelings contributed to his insight as an artist: hence his valorisation here of the hermaphrodite prophet Tiresius as the archetypal visionary artist.176

Over the course of the novel it emerges that Waldo could have achieved enlightenment and perhaps become a true artist if he had been able to accept the gift of a ‘mandala’ offered to him by his twin brother Arthur. Simple, Christ-like Arthur offers glass taws to people who are able to recognise their own need for spiritual wholeness. The mandala became for White, as it was for many people in the postwar period influenced by the thought of Jung, a symbol of this essential human unity and wholeness.177 White referred to people who he thought had achieved such a unity, like Manoly’s younger sister Elly, as “solid mandalas”.178 In White’s idiosyncratic mythological schema, Waldo

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must become a ‘solid mandala’, he must unite his rational and moral side with his spiritual and emotional side. Although Waldo thinks of Arthur as his burden, because of his brother’s simpleness, it is clear that he relies on and needs Arthur. He frequently bemoans being unable to get away from Arthur but never takes the opportunity to do so. 179

Waldo needs to attain the ‘true’ artist’s vision and sensitivity, but wants to be an artist in order to be praised for possessing these qualities: “He hoped against hope the Influential Client would soon speak. Then he would walk up the hill to the Feinsteins’, and present himself and say: Here I am, an intellectual, working at Sydney Municipal Library – kindness is not enough, you must respect, not my genius exactly, but at least my Australian-literary ambitions”. (110) Waldo’s efforts to become an artist are ultimately unsuccessful because he fails to recognise that the achievement of emotional maturity, spiritual fulfilment and transcendent vision, upon which true aesthetic creativity depends, entails an acceptance of the fundamental impurity of both himself and the world. His impure desires, the bases of his creativity, remain repressed, while his revulsion at humanity’s impurity remains overwhelming. So Waldo fails to achieve the puritan ideal of transcending base humanity because he lacks the true puritan’s humility. For White, God himself is capable of mistakes and even wrongdoing. In this White’s God is less like that of most Christians, puritan or otherwise, and more like the ancient Greek gods or the gods of the anthropologist late-Modernist poet Ted Hughes. But for White, as for the original Puritans, spiritual purity or transcendence paradoxically requires a prior acceptance of humankind’s fundamentally flawed and impure nature. Waldo’s tragedy, it is clear, derives not from his devotion to the puritan quest for transcendence, but from the fact that his quest is unsuccessful. The ultimate value of this essentially puritan religious quest, the overarching ideal of White’s British-Australian culture, is affirmed.

Where Waldo deeply resents the fact that his brother Arthur has a vocation, Duffield’s resentment is engendered by his stepsister Rhoda scoffing at the idea that he has one. This takes place when Maman (Freda) Courtney produces a planchette:

Suddenly Hurtle knew that he would ask the question. He hoped the others wouldn’t notice he was bursting trembling with it. When he had shouted them down, he very quietly asked: ‘What am I going to be, Planchette?’ He added: ‘Please.’

161
It was the most awful moment of his life, more awful than finding out what the Duffields and the Courtneys had arranged. They must all believe if they saw it written.

The board was wobbling hopelessly. Trundling heavily.

It groaned. But wrote.

Though he was leaning forward to watch and read, Rhoda was so furiously concentrated, she got there before him and shouted in his face: “‘Painter’, it’s written! What – a house painter?” exactly as the jackaroo at Mumbelong had said, to be funny; but in Rhoda’s case, she could only be jealous: he could have killed her, but was never able to think of words deadly enough.

Maman said in her calmest voice: “Well, then, let us ask, ‘What kind of painter will Hurtle be?’”

The board joggled worse than ever.

Because greedy and jealous, Rhoda was always the first to read.

“An oil-painter!” she yelled. “Somebody must be guiding it.”

“Why should they be guiding it?” He fairly blasted her. (117)

As Hurtle Duffield recognises and accepts his vocation from the earliest age, the central constraint on his puritan quest for spiritual transcendence is not something within himself, as is the case with Waldo Brown, but rather the culture around him, and more specifically, the popular, nationalist culture centred on the materialist and conformist ideal of mateship. While White is certainly critical of upper-class, Anglo- and European-Australians in this novel, it is the working-class and petit-bourgeois Australians who are least able to recognise Duffield’s genius and who are most in need of cultural vivisection, emotional maturity and spiritual enlightenment. With the partial exception of Nance Lightfoot, and of course the ‘noble’ Duffield, characters of this lower socio-economic and cultural background are the least fully developed characters of the novel. There is no sense that the culture of these people might provide them with the capacity for proper artistic appreciation and the psychological growth and spiritual transcendence that are shown to flow from this.

The comparatively brief chapter on Duffield’s encounter with the grocer Cecil Cutbush in a city park demonstrates the intellectual and cultural paucity of members of this nationalist Australian culture. Duffield and Cutbush meet on a council bench where “neighbourhood acquaintances ... would sit staring out over the wasteland”. (254) These people, then, are immediately portrayed as stupid, or vacant-minded, and as living in a wasteland, an allusion to T.S. Eliot’s panicked Modernist description of mass and popular
cultures and lifestyles. Cutbush arrives and, hoping for “a yarn”, (254) engages in
cy: “I was
watching the skyline’”, says Duffield. “There’s a very brief phase when the houses
opposite remind me of unlit gas fires ... I came here this evening ... because I particularly
wanted to be alone”’. (257)

Cutbush is an over-fed man, having come “bellying” forward, laughing a “fat-
chinned laugh”, (254, 255) suggesting a lack of restraint and perhaps that he has had life
too good. He talks blandly of the weather to initiate conversation, and says he leads “‘a
very normal life. It’s the right way, isn’t it?’’. (255) Cutbush “would have liked to assess
(Duffield’s) status, but it wasn’t easy. Too many contradictions”: (255) Duffield is too
complex to be understood by this person; but Cutbush is somewhat awestruck by him:
“‘That’s a fine overcoat you got,’ the grocer couldn’t leave alone. ‘I like to see a good
cloth. I’d say, at a guess, that was imported. Bet it’s English.’ ‘Oh? It could be. Yes. I
think it was.’” (255) Tellingly, quality is (as in *The Solid Mandala*) associated with
Englishness. When Duffield stands up to leave, “his figure in the moonlight overawed the
grocer, who became squat, pursy, apologetic: not that he wasn’t as good as anyone else”.
(261) Cutbush is also a little frightened by Duffield’s difference: “He didn’t understand
why the stranger hadn’t completed the exchange of names like any other decent friendly
bloke. He didn’t hold it against him, though. Perhaps the man had his reasons: could have
been a released prisoner or something like that”. (256) Cutbush is “chilled” by, “though
he hadn’t understood”, (259) Duffield’s reference to his belief in a “Divine Vivisector”:
God. (259) We learn that Duffield is emotionally self-contained (‘‘I am not in need – of
anything, or anyone’’), (257) but not egotistical (‘‘I’ve been accused of loving myself.
How could I? When I’ve always known too much about myself’”) (258) and has no
interest in gaining wealth through his art: “I’m not interested in business ... they’re
buying me – almost as if I was groceries”. (260) Duffield’s capacity to make money,
though, is precisely what impresses Cutbush: “‘Go on! I never met a real professional
artist!’”. (260) Duffield leaves, promising to paint a picture of “‘A great white arse
shitting on a pair of lovers – as they swim through a sea of lantana – dislocating
themselves’. It was the sort of joke an educated person could afford to make. The grocer
laughed, of course, but wondered whether he wasn’t being made to laugh at himself”.

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It is alluded to at several points in the chapter that Cutbush has homosexual desires, in spite of his ‘normal’ family life, and part of his being ‘overawed’ by Duffield results from a sexual attraction to him. The chapter ends with Cutbush masturbating in the “wasteland”, (262) “watching the seed he was scattering in vain by moonlight on barren ground”. (262) The act not only suggests his pathetic, repressed desire to have and be like Duffield, but also his ultimate sterility, and that of his culture. Cutbush, like the “Ocker” in George Johnston’s contemporaneous novel *A Cartload of Clay* (1971), is a negative archetype of the conformist, narrowly masculinist Australian culture, centred on mateship.

Though the central constraint on Duffield’s performance of his vocation is this ‘ockerism’, White also identifies a worrying, encroaching American influence on Australian culture, an influence which Duffield firmly resists. America and Americans feature as bringers of mind-numbing consumerist pop culture, the crass celebration of wealth and celebrity, and sterile theoreticist intellectualism. Nance Lightfoot, the prostitute Duffield lives with when he returns home to Australia, offends Hurtle by chewing gum, just as White’s mother had been offended by his father’s chewing gum. Both White and his mother apparently see this as a disturbing sign of America’s shallow, consumerist cultural influence: “‘Here’ – (Nance) came and sat on the edge of the bed, tearing the paper off a strip of fresh spearmint – ‘stuff in some of this. There’s nothun like gum for puttin’ the juice back inter life’”. (200) Nance’s comment here sounds like an advertising jingle, signifying both the working-class Australians’ susceptibility to cultural degradation (their capacity to be impressed by objects as meaningless as chewing gum) and the shallowness of American consumerist cultural influences:

> With his tongue he warded it off, still scented, still brittle. ‘Pffew!’
> ‘It’s what they all do now.’
> ‘I’m not “they”’, he announced too prissily.
> ‘No,’ she said, ‘you’re the real aristercratic prick’. (201)

Shortly afterwards Duffield, trying to connect with Nance (“‘Isn’t it possible for two human beings to inspire and comfort each other simply by being together?’ He wanted that; otherwise the outlook was hopeless”), (205) asks: “‘What do you think about?’”. She replies: “‘I dunno, Money. A big dark cool house, full of furniture and clothes. And a
big American limousine. I’d have to have a chauffeur to drive me about – with a good body – just for show, though. I wouldn’t mind if the chauffeur was a wonk ... I’d have one of those big – what -you-call-em dogs – that film actresses have”. (205) As the working-class are prey to degrading American consumerism, so too are the young: Duffield fears at one stage for instance that “if she had been present, he knew he wouldn’t necessarily be able to invoke [Kathy Volkov’s] intuitive genius in his defence. More likely, the carnal, brutal, thoughtless (or calculating) Kathy would blow bubble-gum in his face”. (517)

At the age of 55 (394), at a party thrown by Mrs Mortimer, one of the Sydney upper crust who regard artists as interesting and so appropriate dinner-party guests, he meets Sharman, “a plain and shiny American girl he had been avoiding”. (413) When she is introduced to Duffield she responds as someone awe-struck by celebrity:

‘Oh, no! Not Duffield!’ squealed the American girl ... The man on board who gave the talks told us about you, sir – oh, about Dobell, and Drysdale, and I dunno who – but Duffield! From squealing, she changed her tune and her expression to suit a few drawn-out cello-notes: ‘Mr Duffield, I’d like you to know it’s the most important moment of my life – intellectually, and spiritually.’ (414)

Like a true aristocrat, Duffield is appalled by this crassness: “He could hear his own breath expiring, feel the flesh shrivelling on his bones, before sticking his nose into the bowl of roses he had more or less appropriated”. (414) When he finds his sister Rhoda living in poverty and has her move in with him, she draws the connection between America and wealth, asking: “Are you rich, Hurtle? They say you’ve made a packet. I suppose one can’t help it once one begins. I read about a sale of paintings to the United States”. (447) “He must watch himself”, (518) thinks Hurtle as fame arrives, and “his cunning hand was forced to increased displays of virtuosity”. (518) Indeed: “Flattery flowed as never before. Americans would pay grotesque sums for paintings he sometimes secretly admitted to be amongst his worst”. (518) “Some of his paintings and drawings of this period”, Duffield thinks, “would not be seen in his lifetime unless dragged into the open by force ... They were the fruit of his actual life, as opposed to the one in which he painted pictures for Americans to buy, and where the dealers jollied him along. His actual life, or secret work, was magnificent, if terrifying”. (518)
After serving in the First World War Duffield works for a year in Paris, washing dishes at night and “hanging round l’Huissier’s studio” (177) by day. His fellow artists there, “all of whom were making the ‘new’ approach to art”, (177–178) included “two American ladies of doubtful age, a youngish Englishman of taste, and sundry Scandinavians”. (177) One of these “American ladies bought him a meal and wished to discuss ‘organic integrity’”. (178) When Duffield is older and famous he receives “an air letter from the United States”. (602) “But”, we learn, “it was a time-waster, from a woman asking him to discuss his paintings in connection with an essay she was writing for an intellectual magazine”. (602) Here, American intellectual influences are seen as overly scientistic or formalist, and so as sterile.

The central constraint on the main characters’ quest for emotional fulfilment and spiritual enlightenment in *The Eye of the Storm* is a culture of radical individualism and materialistic greed, associated most strongly in the novel with America. Although the motives of Basil and Dorothy in *The Eye of the Storm* appear questionable, they are not overtly ‘bad’ characters and never admit to themselves that they unequivocally wanted the death of their mother. This degree of selfishness, crassness and vulgarity is reserved for Doctor Gidley, who arrives to deal with Elizabeth Hunter’s body. We hear about his arrival through the perspective of one of Elizabeth’s nurses, Flora Manhood:

(Who else but fat silky smarmy Gidley?) *This is Sister Manhood speaking Doctor I have to report my patient – Mrs Hunter – has died. Said he would come right over. (Gidley favoured the American language, except in Mrs Hunter’s presence, when he became more sort of English.) Sounded excited. So he might be over the death of a wealthy senile woman.* (542)

Gidley’s American language goes hand in hand with the American culture of radical individualism that he embodies. Bloated from over-consumption, he lacks any respect for Elizabeth Hunter or for the importance of life and death:

The fat slob of a doctor was standing in the porch under the light she had switched on before opening the door. He was carrying his medical bag as usual. He appeared no different, except that his eyes were shining. Probably an attempt to assume reverence for what was a sad as well as an important occasion had given him the guilty air ... They went in to what was, incredibly, a body laid out on Mrs Hunter’s bed. The damp pledgets prevented you seeing what was underneath, whether human eyelids, or
slits cut out of a painted mask. The green shadows on the cheeks had been emphasised by the nurse’s tying up the jaw with a bandage and removing the teeth. A thick black line surrounding the lips had melted and overflowed into the cracked crimson, making the mouth look like a stitched seam, and increasing the mask effect. The doctor laughed low. ‘Kinky games the pair of you got up to!’ (545)

He writes out the death certificate while sitting in “the easiest chair” (546) and he will not move so as not to be in sight of Elizabeth Hunter when Sister Manhood bathes her. He goes on to talk about the money Manhood will have left to her, and to state his resentment that doctors rarely receive a share:

‘Expect you’ll come out of it pretty well – isn’t your name “Flora”? ‘I don’t expect a thing.’ If this dirty man forced her into talking virtuous, for once she needn’t feel a hypocrite. ‘The meanest of the rich remember their nurses in the will. If they don’t, the solicitor reminds them. To remind them of the doctor too, would be logical, wouldn’t it? But they almost never get round to that.’ (546)

Gidley is also nouveau riche and aspirational in class terms: “Dr Gidley (‘Graham’) always on the up and up, with his young (monied) wife, his two little boys at the right school, his practice desirably situated, subscriber to the opera and orchestral concerts, and member of the AJC.” (546)

As with the corporate entrepreneurs of the 1980s, Gidley assumes a casual, informal, ‘call me Graham’ air, eschewing cultural tradition, while being only interested in his own self advancement. He is also profoundly egotistical and pursuant of sexual conquest for its own sake ("[Flora Manhood] had given the mouth its last wipe with the flannel when she realised from the breathing that Dr Gidley was close behind her, or closer still: he was rubbing himself, blubbery man, against her buttocks. ‘Flora, eh?’ At the same time making his obscene thrust"), (547) yet is also “more wind than piss”. (547) Importantly, too, he is a technically skilled worker, suggesting a connection between this shallow, self-centred American culture and the contemporary hypertrophy of technical knowledge and amoral scientism. As White wrote to Geoffrey Dutton: “In a way the book is a kind of parallel of what has begun to happen round here, though perhaps only I could see it!” 181 “A horrifying wave of vulgarity is sweeping the land”, he said. 182 As Marr suggests, “The progress of ugliness and greed is a pulse that beats through The Eye
of the Storm. Corrupt Sydney, more corrupt than ever, was booming and half the city seemed to have been torn down to make way for cheap apartments and glass office blocks”.

In his lack of empathy and his unawareness of the significance of the life and death of the person he has treated, Gidley emerges as a shallow, pathetic fool. His response – and so experience – stand in stark contrast to that of Elizabeth Hunter’s cook, Lotte Lippman – who kills herself now that her service has come to an end – and her chief nurse, Sister Mary de Santis:

After a long attempt at sleeping, Sister de Santis realised she would not succeed ... Seeing the dark was beginning to thin, she went down presently. She put a coat over her nightdress. She took the rusted can which she kept filled with seed. In the garden the first birds were still only audible shadows, herself an ambulant tree. The hem of her nightdress soon became saturated, heavy as her own flesh, as she filled the birds’ dishes. Reaching up, her arms were rounded by increasing light. In the street an early worker stared as he passed, but looked away on recognising a ceremony. A solitary rose, tight crimson, emerged in the lower garden; it would probably open later in the day. Light was strewing the park as she performed her rites. Birds followed her, battering the air, settling on the grass whenever her hand, trembling in the last instant, spilt an excess of seed ... She could feel claws snatching for a hold in her hair. She ducked, to escape from this prism of dew and light, this tumult of wings and her own unmanageable joy. Once she raised an arm to brush aside a blue wedge of pigeon’s feathers. The light she could not ward off: it was by now too solid, too possessive; herself possessed. Shortly after she went inside the house. In the hall she bowed her head, amazed and not a little frightened by what she saw in Elizabeth Hunter’s looking glass. (588–589)

Selfless devotion to duty, White suggests – this traditional puritan ideal of Anglo-Australian culture – yields a deep, satisfying, illuminating glimpse of the true value of human life.

Over the course of this decade of novel writing the object of criticism within White’s cultural politics moves from being his own, British-Australian puritanism, dominant within Australia until at least the mid-1960s, to traditionally working-class, conformist Australian nationalism, strongly emergent within Australia between the mid-1960s and mid-1970s, and then on to the radical individualism and materialist consumerism of the US, seemingly beginning to gain dominance within Australia from
around the beginning of the 1970s. White stopped writing novels with such explicitly
metaphysical concerns after *The Eye of the Storm*, indicating his awareness that the social
structure and mode of organisation that sustained the status of these novels in the
Australian context was in the process of being fundamentally changed. The structure of
feeling to which he appealed and from which his books achieved their cultural status, was
becoming increasingly marginal within the society as a whole. White’s novels of the
Whitlam period are fundamentally metaphysical in their concerns because as a devoutly
(if idiosyncratically) religious intellectual White believed his society to be fundamentally
materialist, that this was the biggest problem of his society, and that through novels of
this kind he could offer a glimpse of a deeper reality.

**Conclusion**

White’s position as the central inheritor of and spokesperson for British-Australian ‘high’
culture meant that his public, private and artistic support for Whitlam were especially
important, culturally and politically. As Simon During suggests, White’s work was at this
time received in highly reverent terms. And the novel was until the 1970s regarded as
the most important and powerful art form. Although critics have tended to focus on the
metaphysical and religious aspects of these works and to characterise White as a
‘metaphysical’ or strictly philosophical novelist, it can be gathered that White’s
spiritual, aesthetic and cultural concerns were intimately connected with his politics. *The
Solid Mandala, The Vivisector* and *The Eye of the Storm* valorise the spiritual, stress the
need for and value of emotional fulfilment and steadfastly criticise narrow materialism,
utilitarianism and greed in order to build support for the kind of society, based on the
traditionally dominant Anglo-Australian cultural ideal of selfless morality, that White –
and Whitlam – believed in. By the same token, the declining place of White within
Australian popular and scholarly reading circles is indicative of the extent to which the
traditional Anglo-Australian culture or structure of feeling – that helped to sustain
Whitlamism – has become less powerful within Australia since the mid-1970s. “White
was particularly sensitive to the precarious nature of human identity”, suggests John
McLaren, because he was “a member of a class on the brink of dispossession”. The
dismissal of Whitlam and the subsequent rejection of him and his political vision by the
Australian electorate in 1975 and 1977 can be seen to mark the beginning of an effective decline within Australia of the cultural traditions White and Whitlam embodied and advanced. In the most general sense, as Raymond Williams suggested, the art and culture of a period are not simply the products of material structures and political modes of social organisation, but also shape these things. In advancing a cultural basis for Whitlam’s politics, White’s ‘metaphysical’ novels of the Whitlam period helped to shape the structure and nature of Australian society.

6 In the lead up to the 1969 federal election White wrote to Geoffrey Dutton on 3 August 1969: “I shall have to vote for Whitlam whom I don’t like much more than Gorton”. Quoted in Marr, *Patrick White*, p.493.
7 As Marr recounts, “White had switched his vote [from the conservatives in 1969] only reluctantly as a protest against the Vietnam War, but, by the time the watershed elections of December 1972 came, he was a committed supporter of the Labor Party”. *Patrick White*, pp.514–515.
9 “New friends had made Labor palatable. Senator (Diamond) Jim McClelland was a worldly lawyer almost untouched by the Tory pessimism that passes for wisdom among Sydney’s barristers. They had met in 1971”. Marr, *Patrick White*, p.515.
10 As White explains: “Not long before this (dinner party) occasion, Whitlam and his government had decided to introduce a system of Australian honours to supplement the Queen’s British rewards, and eventually, one hoped, replace them. I had been offered one of these gongs which I had hesitated to take because I have always felt that, although such honours may be right enough for performers, they draw a writer’s teeth. Only by degrees on that evening at the McClellands’ I began to scent the reason for my being there. Our hosts had not been told in advance why the Governor-General had asked for me ... After dinner, as the other guests were moving away, I was pinned against the table to the tune of a few vice-regal farts, and the subject of the Australian Order was broached. ‘If you don’t take it,’ I was told, ‘you’ll ruin everything.’ It was disconcerting, to say the least. After a day or two I agreed to accept, so as not to ruin everything”. *Flaws in the Glass*, pp.228–230. After the Dismissal, Marr records that White was filled with “disgust” at himself for having broken his own rules to accept membership of the Order. *Patrick White*, p.557. White then quit the Order, writing to Dutton: “All such honours are bribes, and all honours are political”. Quoted in Marr, *Patrick White*, p.578.
In his literary self-portrait White recalled that his appearance at this rally led some to question his integrity: “There were those who said, ‘Of course he has been got at.’” Flaws in the Glass, p.226. Earlier he wrote: “During the ’Seventies I withdrew from circulation. I had got to know the habits of contemporary rank and riches. Some of those belonging to our affluent society would argue that they had dropped me for being a traitor to my class”.


In his account of the idea for and organisation of the rally Jim McClelland writes: “The next task was to sell the idea to enough prestigious people in the artistic community, most of whom, whatever their enthusiasms, were notoriously chary of associating their names publicly with political movements. The biggest name in Australia’s artistic community was and is Patrick White. I knew that if I could persuade Patrick, something of a recluse even at that time and wary of all politicians, to appear the battle for the others would be easy. I went straight to a phone and put my request to him. There was an almost interminable pause before he replied: ‘Yes, one would be prepared to do that’. We were in business.”

Stirring the Possum – A Political Autobiography, Penguin, Ringwood, 1988, pp.145–146. No political rally had previously been held at the Opera House, and artists hadn’t been brought in to a political campaign in this way before. “Freda McClelland”, Marr writes, “then recruited painters, poets, actors and playwrights for the platform”. Patrick White, p.547. In addition to the three thousand in the hall, Marr also notes that five thousand more “stood outside listening to the speeches”. Patrick White, p.547.

Quoted in Marr, Patrick White, p.547.

As White testified in Flaws in the Glass: “Too much has been written already about this shoddy episode of our history ... I introduce it only because of the effect it had on me then and afterwards: the part played by the Liberal Senators, the conniving character who replaced Whitlam as Prime Minister, and the more sinister intrigues of the media and foreign powers interested in seeing Whitlam brought down, all contributed to the bitterness which had been growing in me, and which helped drive me farther to the left” (p.230).

Marr writes: “White was culling out those of his friends who welcomed the Fraser government ... This sorting along political lines meant the disappearance of the Eastern Suburbs friends who had tinkled and gossiped happily at [White’s house in] Martin Road for years”. Patrick White, p.578.

White, Flaws in the Glass, p.231.

The final statement from White is taken from a 20 November 1975 letter to the scholar Peter Beatson.

See Marr, Patrick White, p.558.

White, ‘Kerr and the Consequences’ (1976), quoted in Brennan and Flynn, Patrick White Speaks, p.60.


White “greatly admired the early volumes of Clark’s History of Australia. They continued to correspond until (White) grew enraged with Clark’s prominent role in the Bi-centennial celebrations of 1988”. Marr, Letters, p.634. White “read each of the volumes [of Clark’s History of Australia] as they appeared”.

“Interesting to see how we have remained the same pack of snarling mongrel dogs”, White wrote to Clark in 1968, suggesting already his antipathy to attempts to ‘whitewash’ or ‘puritanise’ Australian history and culture. Quoted in Marr, Patrick White, p.480.

See White, Flaws, p.255.

Quoted in Marr, ibid., p.578.

Quoted in Marr, ibid., p.579.

Marr, Letters, p.645.


See Marr, Letters, p.645.

As Delys Bird suggests, the Nobel represented a tangible international acknowledgement of the value of Australian literature. ‘New Narrations: Contemporary Fiction’, in Elizabeth Webby, ed., The Cambridge Companion to Australian Literature, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, p.186. Geoffrey Bolton notes too: “It gave a felicitous boost to the new nationalism when in 1973 Patrick White became the first...
Australian to receive the Nobel Prize for literature”. The Middle Way, pp.229–230. The Award must have appeared to be a tacit endorsement of Whitlam’s policy of significantly increasing investment in the arts.

32 Marr, Patrick White, p.537.
33 Quoted in Marr, Patrick White, p.537.
34 See White’s letters to Whitlam (26 February 1978), Manning Clark (18 January 1979), and Dorothy Green (25 November 1983), in Marr, Letters, pp.505, 513, 585.
36 Ibid., pp.559, 560.
38 Ibid., pp.408–409. In juxtaposing a man of the law with White and Clark, Freudenberg also implicitly suggests that those who were not ‘liberated’ by the Whitlam government lacked imagination. James Walter observes that Freudenberg’s “closeness to Whitlam might indicate that he is retailing the ‘authorised’ version of (Whitlam’s) life”. The Leader, p.199.
40 Ibid., p.562.
41 Ibid., p.588.
42 Ibid., pp.553–554.
43 Ibid., p. 554.
44 Ibid., p.553.
47 Ibid., p.69.
48 Ibid., White Speaks, pp.69–70.
50 Ibid., p.64.
51 White, Flaws in the Glass, p.227.
52 “Fraser had never been comfortable with Keynesianism’s deficit financing and now that its flaws were evident, he slipped back easily into morally charged financial precepts reminiscent of the 1930s: governments shouldn’t spend money they don’t have; governments must reduce their expenditure; people must accustom themselves to restraint and sacrifice; ‘Governments must again learn how to say “no”’, ‘all the pump priming in the world will not cure unemployment’, and most famously, ‘life wasn’t meant to be easy’”. Brett, Australian Liberals, p.151. On ‘new liberalism’ see Marion Sawer, ‘Philosophical Underpinnings of Libertarianism in Australia’, in Sawer, ed., Australia and the New Right, pp.20–37.
55 See chapters 1 through 4 of Marr, Patrick White, pp.3–67, for a detailed account of the White’s family history. On the nineteenth-century squatters as important members of the Australian ruling class see Connell and Irving, Class Structure in Australian History, pp.53–54.
56 Marr, Patrick White, p.9.
57 As Marr writes, White “believed in blood and ancestors”. Patrick White, p.4.
58 White, Marr explains further, was “born in London to Australian parents who took pains to see that his upbringing confirmed the puzzling circumstances of his birth. ‘It is not that I am not Australian,’ he remarked. ‘I am an anachronism, something left over from that period when people were no longer English and not yet indigenous.’ At whichever end of the Empire he lived, he always knew there was another home for him on the other side of the world”. Patrick White, p.11.
59 Marr, Patrick White, p.53.
60 Ibid., p.53.
61 Ibid., p.16.
62 In Marr’s estimation: “On their acres the Whites pursued tenacious, hard-working lives relieved by polo and marriage. They were loyal, temperate, unsociable, rather mean, conservative and cool-blooded. If they suffered any spiritual hunger, it was satisfied by the Church of England. They were not readers”. Ibid., p.16.
63 The White’s mansions and other buildings were mostly designed by an American: Horbury Hunt, though in an English style, containing English stained glass for example. See Marr, ibid., p.18. According to
White, his mother Ruth “rooted out methodically” tree ferns, in order to establish “her English garden”. *Flaws in the Glass*, p.17.

White “loved Lizzie”, his Scottish, Presbyterian nanny, from whom “the purpose of life was fulfilment not enjoyment”. Marr, *Patrick White*, p.39.

Ibid., p.67.


Ibid., p.32.


Ibid., p.153.

See Marr, *Patrick White*.

White, *Flaws in the Glass*, p.23.

Ibid., p.9.

Ibid., p.8.

Ibid., pp.13, 9, 14.


Quoted in Marr, *Patrick White*, p.369.

As Marr writes, “The old-fashioned restraint, shared on each side of the Atlantic by [publishers Frank] Morley and [Ben] Huebsch, was welcome” to White, who “would never promote his novels with interviews, tours, or campus appearances. More subtle methods had to be employed”. White “did not appear to mourn” the death of his own mother. And he was notoriously tight-fisted in day to day life. *Patrick White*, pp.307, 427, 374.

Quoted in Marr, *Patrick White*, p.12.


Quoted in Marr, *Patrick White*, p.284.

Ibid., p.311.


Ibid.

Oakes and Solomon, *The Making of an Australian Prime Minister*, p.49.


*Whitlam and Frost*, p.171.

Ibid., p.171.

Ibid., p.175.

Quoted in Walter, *The Leader*, p.211.

See for example Oakes: ‘The Years of Preparation’, in Frost, p.38: “Whitlam’s vitality is his most striking attribute ... Whitlam worked harder [than Prime Minister McMahon], without making a public production out of it, and more efficiently and systematically. It was Whitlam’s capacity for work which made Mick Young an admirer and loyal supporter”.

Brett, *Australian Liberals and the Moral Middle Class*, p.145.

Ibid.

Ibid.


Freda Whitlam, in Walter, *The Leader*, p.204.


Ibid., p.10.

Ibid., pp.10-11.


White writes: “Most children have theatre in them. Those who carry it over into adolescence and, more or less, maturity, commit the ultimate indecency of becoming professional actors. If I didn’t go all the way, I became instead that far more indecent hybrid, a frustrated one. Sexual ambivalence helped drive me in on myself. Lacking flamboyance, cursed with reserve, I chose fiction, or more likely it was chosen for me, as the means of introducing to a disbelieving audience the cast of contradictory characters of which I am composed”. Flaws in the Glass, p.20. On Whitlam’s high school acting and his personal reasons for taking it up, see Oakes, Whitlam PM, p.18.

White, Flaws in the Glass, pp.231–232.


Ibid., p.253.


In The Vivisector White’s artist Hurtle Duffield is “born old”; (411) and Duffield later says of the young artist Kathy Volkov (a pianist), “I should have said she sprang out of her mother fully grown.” (509)


As Gay Hawkins suggests, while ‘community arts’ was “a product of the Whitlam Labor government”, community arts within the Australia Council during this time “was ... trapped within the inherited [‘high’ cultural] legitimations for arts funding which Whitlam left largely intact and which dominated the rest of the Australia Council”. ‘Reading Community Arts Policy: From Nimbin to the Gay Mardi Gras’, in Vivienne Binns, ed., Community and the Arts: History, Theory, Practice, Pluto Press, Leichhardt, 1991, pp.47, 50.

Marr, Patrick White, p.341. Peggy Garland was one of the three Withycombe sisters that White met in the late 1920s. In Marr’s account, they became “his English family”. Letters, p.636.

An ABC television reporter asked White in 1989 for example “How important is love to life?”. White replied: “It’s all important – but not lust.” “What type of love is important?” pressed the reporter. White replied: “Affection, I think. Yes, affection.” Quoted in Marr, Patrick White, p.642. Marr notes also that “in White’s world, the way we fulfil our obligations to the sick is a mark of our capacity to love”. Ibid., p.512.

White, Flaws in the Glass, p.217.


Ibid., p.175.

Marr, Patrick White, p.346.

Quoted in Marr, Patrick White, p.485.

White, Flaws in the Glass, p.152.

Marr, Patrick White, p.491.


White, ‘Civilisation, Money and Concrete’ (1973), in Brennan and Flynn, White Speaks, p.36.


Marr, Patrick White, pp.491–492.

White, Flaws in the Glass, p.11.


Marr, Patrick White, p.358.

Quoted in Marr, Patrick White, p.198.

Ibid., p.198.


Ibid., p.200.
143 Ibid., pp.200–201.
144 Ibid., p.211.
145 Ibid., p.302.
146 Ibid., p.311.
147 Ibid., p.320.
148 Ibid., p.457.
149 Quoted in Marr, ibid., p.458.
150 Ibid., p.458; quoting White’s 3 April 1966 letter to Geoffrey Dutton.
151 Quoted in Marr, ibid., p.504.
152 “White delayed sending (The Eye of the Storm) to New York. At Christmas he told Viking he was too busy tying up parcels to get round to sending the typescript. He knew the excuse was lame, but he was stalling to make sure the book appeared first in London where good reviews might ‘give a lead to those incompetent Americans’”. “Quite deliberately, White delayed sending the New York copy (of The Twyborn Affair) so that London again had a head start. He was not going to put Twyborn’s fate into the hands of the New York critics”. Marr, ibid., pp.514, 587.
154 As Marr suggests, “the transformation of this private conservative into a public radical began with his initially cautious and later vociferous disapproval of America’s role in Vietnam”, Patrick White, p.492.
155 Relevant here is Marr’s observation that “God and love are the two great mysteries of White’s world ... Few of his lives are shaped by the search for pleasure: his men and women sacrifice very little for desire”. Ibid., p.511.
156 Waldo’s twin brother Arthur, symbolising Waldo’s and White’s repressed, loving, intuitive, feminine side, kills Waldo, though after having been provoked to do this by Waldo’s destroying a poem that he had written.
157 See also Brian Kiernan’s observation: “On the first page, the ‘crook-neck’ white pullet the others peck at introduces the view of the artist as outsider that White is adapting, or translating, to Australia”. Patrick White, Macmillan, London and Basingstoke, 1980, p.103.
158 Duffield’s experience here echoes that of White, who was put in the care of Lizzie Clark and then sent away to Cheltenham.
159 Marr, Patrick White, p.471.
161 In Hewitt, Patrick White: Painter Manque, p.78.
162 See Hewitt, ibid., p.78.
163 “The novel tends to stress the darker purposes in the lives of the main characters”, White wrote to Tom Maschler on 15 November 1972 (quoted in Marr, Patrick White, p.494); cf. King Lear: “Meantime we shall express our darker purpose”. William Shakespeare, King Lear (c.1605–1606), I.1.36. Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1972, p.62.
164 “I have always had the guilty feeling that [his and his sister’s] suggestion [to put their mother Ruth in an old folk’s home] may have killed her, not so much the prospect of leaving possessions she could no longer see, as the thought of dying surrounded by Roman Catholic nuns”. White, Flaws in the Glass, p.150.
165 As White wrote to Ingmar Bjorksten, Swedish author of a critical introduction to White’s fiction, on 27 July 1973, he intended to suggest that during the storm Basil and Dorothy’s mother Elizabeth Hunter finds “peace and spiritual awareness”. Quoted in Marr, Patrick White, p.511.
166 On White’s moment of spiritual illumination in the rain at his ‘Dogwoods’ property see Marr, Patrick White, p.281.
167 Ibid., p.511.
168 As White said in an interview with Craig McGregor in 1969: “Characters interest me more than situations. I don’t think any of my books have what you call plots”. White, ‘In the Making’, p.21. In the novels he wrote after the Whitlam period, generally less concerned with metaphysical issues, plots became more evident. Consider The Twyborn Affair (1979), for example.
“Anne Brown, born a Quantrell, had created an impression even in one of her old blue dresses with tea-stained lace insertion, or until her last days and illness, which were beyond human control. Waldo understood that those who lowered their eyes in passing were paying homage to someone of his mother’s stock”. The Solid Mandala, p.59.

It is clear from White’s choice of characters in other novels and from his public and private statements on the nature and function of art and artists that White would not have focused on people from this Australian community only because he felt most closely aligned with them or most able to write about them. White felt able to speak for individuals of any heritage in his work – consider the portrayal of the Aboriginal Jew Alf Dubbo in Riders in the Chariot (1961) for example – and saw this ability as a sign of his quality as an artist.


White, Flaws, pp.146–147.

Allwright’s name, of course, suggests the pervasive Australian celebration of ‘averageness’ that White detested.

As Marr suggests, for White “intuition was a powerful feminine virtue. The intuitive Patrick White was the feminine Patrick White: sexuality was not only a source of insight but one of the forces that drove him to write”. Patrick White, p.582.

According to Marr, “White’s unshackled spiritual curiosity had led him in the early 1960s towards the occult. He was a figure of his time. He discovered the tarot in London in 1963 when the Duttons introduced him to the painter Lawrence Daws”. Patrick White, p.451. Lawrence Daws, states Hewitt, “discussed Jungian archetypes at length with White, as well as giving him Psychology and Alchemy, which could almost serve as a concordance to The Solid Mandala”. Patrick White: Painter Manque, p.67.


See for example: “It was impossible to escape Arthur unless Arthur himself chose to escape”. White, The Solid Mandala, p. 83.

Rhoda also, significantly, accepts her own vocation as a carer for stray cats.

Quoted in Marr, Patrick White, p.509.

Quoted in Marr, ibid., p.509.

Ibid., p.509.

According to Simon During, it was White’s “luck and fate to write just when Australia needed a great writer and there was a transnational cultural infrastructure through which it could produce one for world consumption”. Patrick White, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1996, p.4. In a more personal register, an awed Vane Lindesay recalls that shortly after winning the 1973 Nobel Prize for Literature White was the guest of honour at an inaugural dinner for Overland volunteers: “Patrick was majestic, impressive. Were he casually to say that a green strawberry is not ripe, then it was like god creating by command a botanical truth for all time”. Vane Lindesay, ‘My Fifty Years with Overland’, Overland 174, 2004, p.64. A similarly awe-struck tone informs ‘Encounters With Patrick White’, by Paul Hasluck. Quadrant 34:12, 1990, pp.54–56.


A notable exception is John McLaren, who notes perspicaciously that White’s history, as a semi-expatriate, “along with his homosexuality, endowed him with the double vision of both insider and outsider to Australia’s ruling class. This class was itself losing its dominance as White was growing up. His own sympathies however remain with its members, with their servants and with the poor and outcast. He is a rarity in Australian literature, a genuinely aristocratic writer. This quality produces his distaste for the ordinary run of humanity”. He also notes that “the new manufacturing industries which are the source of the new wealth and power remain absent from (The Tree of Man), as from his other novels. White’s interest is in those who are being dispossessed of their power, and in those who never had it. These alone can find their true selves”. ‘Patrick White: Prophet from the Desert’, introduction to John McLaren, ed., Prophet from the Desert: Critical Essays on Patrick White, Red Hill Press, West Footscray, 1995, pp.ii, vi.

“White’s Australian reputation”, writes Kerryn Goldsworthy, was “just beginning to fade” when Simon During’s monograph on White appeared in 1996; but it seems clear that his popular reputation and sales peaked in the mid 1970s following the awarding of the Nobel Prize. ‘Fiction from 1900 to 1970’, in Webbby, The Cambridge Companion to Australian Literature, p.126. According to Matt Condon, “The
books of White, unlike those of fellow Nobel laureates such as Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Toni Morrison, even Hemingway and Steinbeck, do not ‘move’ in their hundreds, let alone tens of thousands”. ‘White House in Eye of Storm’, the Courier-Mail, 28 February 2005, p.11.