

2009

“Sovereignty and the Work of Death”: Writing from Zimbabwe

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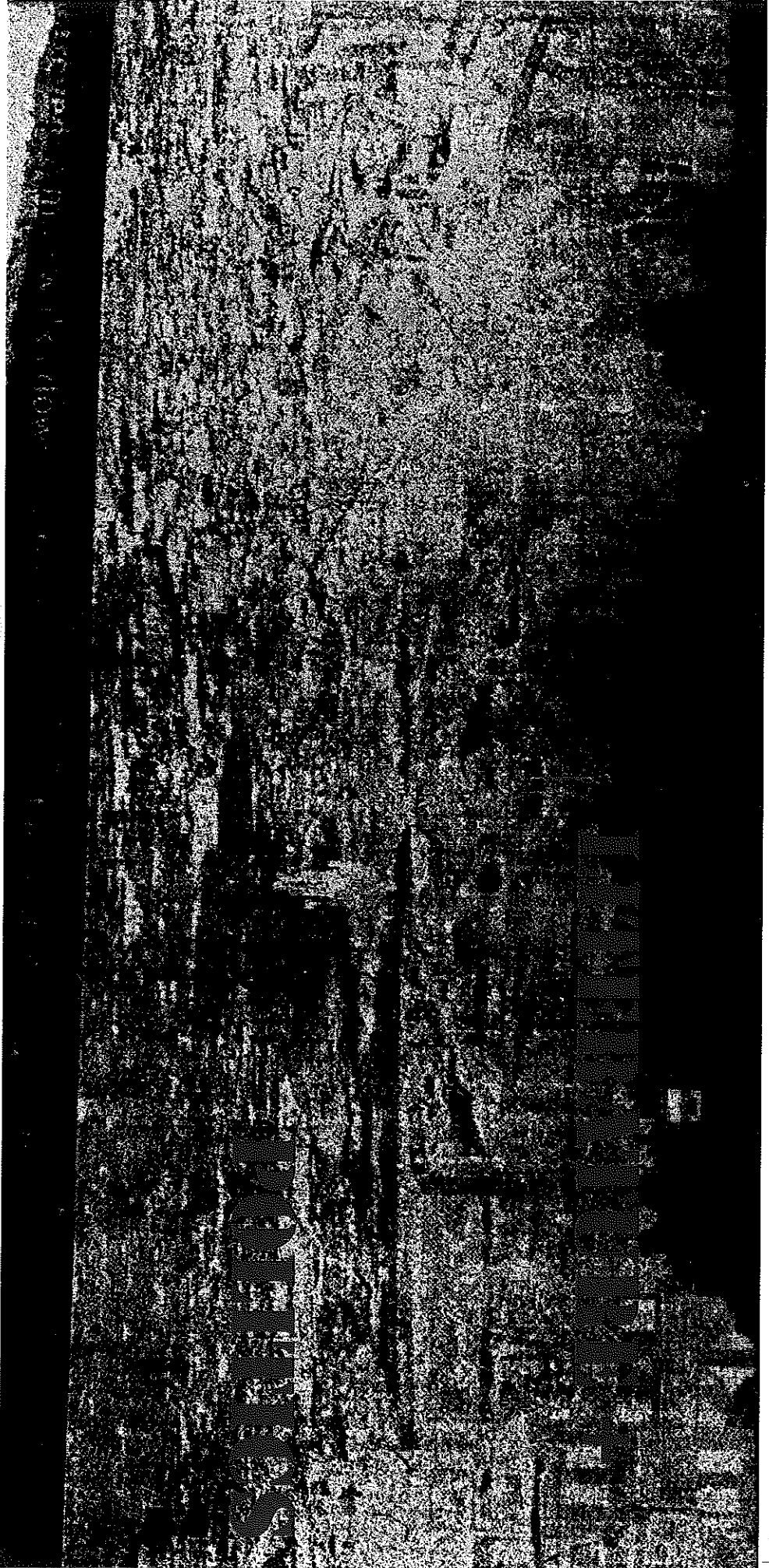
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This conference paper was originally published as:

Pike, D. (2009). “Sovereignty and the Work of Death”: Writing from Zimbabwe. *The 3rd annual conference of The Australasian Association for Literature*.

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**Third Annual Conference of the
Australasian Association for Literature**
University of Sydney
July 6, 7 2009

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS INCLUDE:

Steven Connor (Birkbeck College, University of London)
Gail Jones (University of Western Sydney)
Kiarina Kordela (Macalester College)
Andrew Milner (Monash University)

LITERATURE AND POLITICS

**THIRD ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE
AUSTRALASIAN ASSOCIATION FOR LITERATURE**

University of Sydney,
Australia

6-7 July 2009

Abstracts

Dr. Brigitta Olubas
University of New South Wales

Writing about the United Nations: Shirley Hazzard's Humanist Politic

Although New York-based Australian-born author Shirley Hazzard is best known for her literary fiction, she has also been, throughout her writing career, a forthright commentator on political affairs, or what she calls "public themes". In addition to her four novels and two collections of stories, she has published two monographs on the United Nations: *Defeat of an Ideal* in 1973 and *Courtenage of Truth* in 1990. Informed by insider accounts as well as published records, these works document two major claims: firstly that the US government's post-war McCarthyist policies had indelible effects on the UN structure from its inception, inhibiting the effective prosecution of its responsibilities, and secondly that the very structure of the UN facilitated the covering up of Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim's WWII Austrian Nazi Party affiliation. The argument of both books is thus that the core failures of the United Nations derive from the structural preference of parochial (national) over cosmopolitan (international) public interest. In this sense, they share with Hazzard's fiction an internationalist optic and an overt commitment to humanism as cultural imperative. This paper will examine the convergences between Hazzard's UN writings and her literary fiction. It will argue in particular that the contrary pull of public and poetic responsibility that Hazzard identifies in Milton's essays on Church corruption structures a similar sense of the work of the writer herself, an alignment of the 'public themes' of political critique and commentary with the work of literature.

Carolina Orloff
University of Edinburgh, UK

Julio Cortázar's Forgotten Politics: Anti-Peronism in the Rise of a Writer

It is generally assumed that Julio Cortázar's trip to Cuba in 1963 not only divided his life into a inexorable before and after, into the bourgeois artist *vis-à-vis* the committed socialist, but also that this event created an unambiguous distinction between the writer's so-called 'apolitical' writings and those which express a given ideological stand. This, in turn, was understood also as a drastic turning point for the aesthetic quality of Cortázar's fiction, and therefore, the texts that followed the groundbreaking *Rayuela* (published in English under Hopscotch), were generally considered aesthetically inferior and poor given their implicit or explicit political content. I argue that there are not two different Cortázar periods, but rather that there is an "essential unity", which in itself is charged with a marked political interest. Throughout his life, politics – as well as history – were, for this iconic Argentinian writer, permanent sources of reference, and they can be traced in his fictional writings. This paper will analyse some of Cortázar's early texts, including *Divertimento*, *Los reyes* and *El examen*. Written during the rise of Peronism in Argentina in the late 1940s, these texts remained mostly unpublished until Cortázar's demise in 1984. In the year of the 25th anniversary of the death of one of the founders of the 'Boom' of Latin American literature, the study will reappraise and challenge the accepted criticism, showing that even some of the first of Julio Cortázar's incursions into the fictional realm were, in many respects, highly political.

Hoa Pham
University of Western Sydney

From Orlando to Kieu: Writing from the Post-Colonial Feminist Diaspora

Post colonial diasporic literature can use the canon to make political statements about women's lives and about the society around them. Woolf's *Orlando* is seen as a landmark text for feminist English literature exploring the restraints of gender and Englishness. Currently I am writing a novel 'The Lady of the Realm' which is a Vietnamese diasporic take on 'Orlando'. I wish to interrogate my own position as a Vietnamese diasporic writer whom is Western educated using 'Orlando' as a reference point for my own work. Similar intertextual referencing techniques have been used by Vietnamese Francophone writers using the 'Tale of Kieu' the epic poem of the nineteenth century to make commentary on women's social position in Vietnam. In this paper I will explore this intertextuality and the commentary possible about gender relations, power, politics and colonialism when using canonical texts in this way.

Dr James Phillips
University of New South Wales

The Practicalities of the Absolute: Sovereignty in Shakespeare's Richard II

Richard II does not conform to Hegel's general picture of Shakespeare as a romantic. Like the Greek tragedians Hegel discusses, *Richard II* involves a conflict between two objective principles of political life (where Hegel detects romanticism in Shakespeare is in the conflicts between subjectivity and objectivity, as in the conflict between interiority and action in *Hamlet* and the conflict between desire and family authority in *Romeo and Juliet*). The conflict in *Richard II* is between the absolute as a legitimating principle of the body politic (Richard's divine right) and the rights of subjects. Is it a tragic conflict because the two are irreconcilable? Was the subsequent War of the Roses proof of their irreconcilability? Richard has often been portrayed as imprudent and poetic (Pater, Yeats), but his independence and poetry are no less pragmatic in their way than the hard-headedness of his opponent, Henry IV: this is because the seeming unworldliness of his speech and actions has the political task of testifying to the absolute and ensuring its place in the foundation of political life (it is not his business to be more "sensible"). Richard's dilemma is that as sovereign he is meant to stand outside the laws, norms and customs while nonetheless being expected to conduct himself with moderation. This contradiction of a contained absolute is a feature of Western sovereignty and a possible reason for the various attempts in the modern period at reconfiguring it without an embodying individual.

Dr Deborah Pike
University of Notre Dame

Sovereignty and the Work of Death: Writing from Zimbabwe

This paper discusses the Zimbabwe situation through a study of contemporary writing from that country. Using the philosophy of sovereignty that has been passed down from Hegel to Barille, I examine how contemporary African subjectivity is formed in conditions of political violence and economic flux. Following on from this, I make use of Agamben's work on biopolitics, to suggest ways in which the wounded body can be approached and appraised through the written word.

AUSTRALASIAN ASSOCIATION FOR LITERATURE

NOTES

The Australasian Association for Literature is a newly founded group whose goals are to promote scholarship in literature, and a deeper understanding of how literature develops its own ways of thinking about the world. We have a particular interest in how literature interacts with other disciplines and intellectual standpoints (such as science, philosophy and history) and seek to attract scholars interested in questions which explore what it is that works of literature can do (how they affect us, and why). We understand works of literature to be active things that make us think rather than passive things about which we might reflect, and this understanding informs our belief in the ongoing importance of careful scholarship related to literary works.

At present, the AAL's principal activity is an annual conference. We are always open to proposals for future conferences, and can assist with seed funding. If you are interested in hosting the annual Association conference at your university, or would like more information as to what this entails, please contact us through the Association website: www.aal.asn.au/ The only prescription is that the conference address some aspect of literature, or literature in relation to a broad inclusive theme, such as our three previous conferences have done, i.e., 'Literature and Sensation', 'Literature and History', 'Literature and Politics'.

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	N395 (Ground Floor)	S325 (Ground Floor)	N401 (First Floor)	Woolley Common Room (First Floor)
8.30-9.30		Registration N401 (First Floor)		
9.30-10.30	Gail Jones Organic Shrapnel: Benjamin, DeLillo, and the Scales of Representation Karina Kordela Secular Logics for Grounding Truths and Laws: Amor Fatī, Magic, and Prevention			
10.30-11.00		Morning Tea N497 (First Floor)		
11.00-12.30	Place, Earth, Utopia Matthew Abbott The Myth of the Earth: Heidegger, Poetry and Politics Emma Simone Virginia Woolf and the Politics of Place Dimitris Vardoulakis Political Literature in Greece: The case of Aris Alexandrou's <i>The Mission Box</i>	Modernist Ireland Peter Kuch 'We writers are not politicians' — W.B. Yeats: Poetry, Plays, Prose and Politics, and the Politics of Publication Stephen MacLaren Caesar confesses Christ: revisiting Joyce's revolution of the Word Anthony Uhlmann Politics of Relations in Joyce	Working Class Writing Sarah Atfield The Politics of Working Class Writing Karen Barker 'Rouse up your feeling intensely!': The double horizon of Jean Devanny's socialist teleology and the <i>élan ouvrier</i> Peter Marks Class and the Threat of Fascism in 1930s Britain	Critical Theory Chris Conti The Primacy of the Object Matthew Holt Capitalism as Fiction: <i>The Communist Manifesto</i>
12.30-1.30		Lunch N497 (First Floor)		
1.30-3.00	Post-Colonial Places Jo Coghlan The Syncretic Philosophies of Sukarno: Merdeka and the 'imagined state' in colonial and post-colonial Indonesia Alison Broinowski The hegemonic bargain Mridula Nath Chakraborty In Praise Of Smallness: The Case Of The Provincial, Mufossil Novel	Writing Capitalism Sam Dickson The Spectre Of Capitalism: The Haunted Ideological Subject In Don DeLillo's <i>Falling Man</i> Michael Christie Anthony Macris's <i>Capital, volume one</i> : Negating Financial Derivatives and Neoliberalism through Literary Form James Gourley Thomas Pynchon and DeLillo and terrorism	Race and Racism Alice Curry 'And, please, don't tell me I hate foreigners': Racial Prejudice and Ideological Blind Space in <i>Falling</i> and <i>The Boy in Striped Pyjamas</i> Jasbir Jain The Nation and its Minorities: Refugees and Exiles in the Homeland Stefan Solomon 'Layin' 'mong de t'ings I's allus knowed': Racial Representation and the Residual	Constructing Identities 1: Australians Veronica Brady Walter Benjamin's Dwarf And The Imaginative Construction Of Australia Brigitta Olubas Writing about the United Nations: Shirley Hazard's Humanist Politic Elizabeth Treep Being at Home in Australia: Utopian Constructions in Eve Langley's <i>Bancroft House</i>
3.00-3.30		Afternoon Tea N497 (First Floor)		
3.30-5.00	Australian Subjects Lindsay Barrett An Australian Story Drew Cottle Russel Ward and the Making of the Australian Legend	Constructing Identities 2: Madness and Childhood Gareth Jenkins Resisting Rational Transformation: Mannix Narrating Psychiatry Lucy Hopkins The Politics of Childhood in Christos Tsoikas' <i>The Slap</i> Scarlett Somlo The Madness of Money, Politics and Reality in Vonnegut's <i>God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater</i>	Politics of Literary Production Jason Ensor 'A Policy of Splendid Isolation': Angus & Robertson, George G Harrap and the politics of co-operation in the Australian book trade during the late 1930s Oliver Haag The Politics of Publishing Indigenous Literatures in Germany: A Comparative Study of Australian and New Zealand Indigenous Literatures in German Translation Deborah Jordan Canon, Gender and the Politics of Literary Production	The Uses of Poetry & Rhetoric Mike Hanne Making War and Peace with Metaphor Gavin Smith The significance of poetry in public debate Daniel Derrin The Mental Image and Logical Persuasion
5.30-6.30	Steven Connor Literature, Politics and the Louishness of Learning			
6.30-7.30	Drinks N497 (First Floor)		AGM of AAL N401	
8.00-11.00		Conference Dinner, Nag's Head Pub, 162 St John's Road, Glebe (96601591)		

	N395 (Ground Floor)	S325 (Ground Floor)	N401 (First Floor)	Woolley Common Room (First Floor)
9.00-10.30	<p>Writing and Publishing as Politics <i>Joy Wallace and John O'Carroll</i> The Significance of Writing: From <i>Meanjin</i> to The Little Company <i>Tony Moore</i> Bohemians in the Street: Artists, Politics and Cultural Activism <i>Stephen Lawrence</i> Politics and Australian poetry: Public events and private poetics: 'Like old lovers, politics and the arts have shared an extended intimacy'</p>	<p>Fiction and History <i>Christina Stachurski</i> Writing Pitecairn <i>Samantha Young</i> Paradigm Shift In Contemporary Australian Fiction <i>Hamish Dalley</i> Repenting Colonialism: Kate Grenville's <i>The Secret River</i> and Nationalist Historiography</p>	<p>Genocide <i>Erin Mercer</i> Saul Bellow's difficulties with Holocaust representation in <i>The Victim</i> <i>Mark Steven</i> Secondary Mass Graves: Confronting Genocide through Literature <i>Magdalena Zolkos</i> 'Every man must do his work with love': Provocations of Jonathan Littell's novel <i>The Kindly Ones</i></p>	<p>European Places <i>Tom Lee</i> From Place to Place: Travel and Illness in W. G. Sebald's <i>Vertigo</i> <i>Thomas McLean</i> A Familiar Road: The Eastern European Immigrant and British Literature <i>Angela Killing</i> The very meat of politics in Joschka Fischer's <i>Mein langer Lauf zu mir selbst</i></p>
10.30-11.00	<p>Feminist Politics <i>Hoa Pham</i> From <i>Orlando</i> to <i>Kleur</i>: Writing from the post-colonial feminist diaspora <i>Louise Poland</i> From <i>Mother I'm Rooted to Angels of Power</i>: A Collective History of Feminist Anthologies <i>Tania Sersler</i> Speaking Out: Writing Stories: Feminist Politics and Literary Practices</p>	<p>Shakespeare and Byron <i>James Phillips</i> The Practicalities of the Absolute: Sovereignty in Shakespeare's <i>Richard II</i> <i>Will Christie</i> 'Politics and poetry are different things': English Whig Bards and Scottish Whig Reviewers</p>	<p>Violence and Writing <i>Gustavo Genarini</i> The Beetle: A Betrayed Rhetoric <i>David Williams</i> On the Limits of Irony: Dubravka Ugrešić's Post-Yugoslav Fiction <i>Howard McNaughton</i> Kilroy's Baghdad</p>	<p>The Political Use of Books <i>Jan Zwar</i> Cultural value and the role of books in public debate in Australia in 2004 <i>Jessica Sands</i> Inequality as Contributing Factors in Edgar Allen Poe Award-Winners (2000-2008) <i>Lynda Ng</i> Who Narrates the Nation? Prizes, Politics and (Trans-)National Identity</p>
11.00-12.30	<p>Writing Among Upheaval <i>Carolina Orloff</i> Julio Cortázar's Forgotten Politics: Anti-Petronism in the Rise of a Writer <i>Peter Whiteford</i> 'Don't mention the War': Editorial Intervention in John Mulgan's <i>Report on Experience</i> <i>Andrew Yerkes</i> A Biology of Dictatorships: Liberal Realism in Sinclair Lewis's <i>It Can't Happen Here</i></p>	<p>Lunch N497 (First Floor) Ecopoetics <i>Lindsay Tuggle</i> 'Blood in the ground': Alice Notley's Ecopoetics of Mourning in <i>Alma</i>, or the Dead Women <i>David Musgrave</i> The Politics of The Anti-Pastoral <i>Jenn Martin</i> 'Now we'll see what I can do with this planet': The Rejection of Frontier Analogies in Kim Stanley Robinson's <i>Mars Trilogy</i></p>	<p>Aestheticism and Individuality <i>Angela Dunstan</i> 'An interesting failure': Vernon Lee's Miss Brown and the Sexual Politics of Pre-Raphaelite Aestheticism <i>Lyndall Clipstone</i> 'I'm having an old friend for dinner': Identity and Gourmet Cannibalism in <i>The Silence of the Lambs</i> <i>Deborah Pike</i> Sovereignty and the Work of Death: Writing from Zimbabwe</p>	<p>Representing Peoples <i>Roie Thomas</i> The Khoi-San People Of The Kalahari: Their Struggle In The Work Of Laurens Van Der Post <i>Honni van Rijswijk</i> Literary and Legal Judgment in <i>Carpentaria</i> and <i>Mabo</i> <i>Michael Austin</i> The Unknown Conservative: Commitment and the Rule of Law in Recent Australian Fiction</p>
12.30-1.30	Lunch N497 (First Floor)			
1.30-3.00	<p>Contemporary Fictions <i>Kezia Whiting</i> Ethics and Politics: Intrusion in Ian McEwan's <i>Saturday</i> <i>Marise Williams</i> The altemodern political moment in Paul Auster's <i>Man in the Dark</i> <i>Paul Sheehan</i> All the Trees in the World: Cormac McCarthy and the Politics of the Worst <i>Andrew Milner</i> The Politics of Dystopia: Changing the Climate</p>	<p>Afternoon Tea N497 (First Floor) Place, Nature, Politics <i>Myah Yong Rene</i> Cross-Fertilizing Nature And Culture: Reading Nguni Wa Thiong'o's <i>The River Between</i> And Tsietsi Dangarambga's <i>Nervous Conditions</i> <i>Savi Munjal</i> Telling Stories in a De-storied World - Fictionalizing History in <i>The Kite Runner</i> and <i>A Thousand Splendid Suns</i></p>	<p>Violence and Writing <i>Gustavo Genarini</i> The Beetle: A Betrayed Rhetoric <i>David Williams</i> On the Limits of Irony: Dubravka Ugrešić's Post-Yugoslav Fiction <i>Howard McNaughton</i> Kilroy's Baghdad</p>	<p>The Political Use of Books <i>Jan Zwar</i> Cultural value and the role of books in public debate in Australia in 2004 <i>Jessica Sands</i> Inequality as Contributing Factors in Edgar Allen Poe Award-Winners (2000-2008) <i>Lynda Ng</i> Who Narrates the Nation? Prizes, Politics and (Trans-)National Identity</p>
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