

bodyjamming

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for
Sylvia Mead
Phoebe Baker
Cleo Lohrey
- *women of the future*

and for
Philip Mead

*'If you wait for me
And say you'll hold*

*A place for me
In your heart'*

Remembering Fitzroy High

Rosi Braidotti

I want to thank wholeheartedly my brother Augusto and my mother Bruna for their practical and emotional assistance in the drafting of this essay.

I arrived in Melbourne on 13 June 1970 with one of the last 'assisted passages' from Italy, sponsored by the Australian Immigration Department. We sailed on the *Achille Lauro* around Africa, because Suez was still closed then, and touched land safely in Port Phillip Bay. After a short stay at the migrants' hostel 'Midway' in Maribyrnong and a first spell of work at the Chrysler plant, my parents found employment as car wash attendants in Collingwood and we moved to a small terrace house in Roseneath Street. I started attending Fitzroy High School at the beginning of 1971, just as I turned sixteen and was enrolled in Form 5C. My brother and sister went to the local primary school, Victoria Park. Later on my brother, Augusto, also transferred to Fitzroy High and was around

Helen Garner, who was then a temporary junior teacher assigned to Form 1.

When I arrived in Australia, like most first-generation migrants, I spoke no English at all; at school in Italy I had learnt French. At Fitzroy High I was consequently sent to remedial English classes, which took place in a special pavilion at the back of the playground. The teachers were excellent: competent, motivated and compassionate. The student population was as varied as you can imagine: over twenty-five different nationalities, co-existing in often uneasy proximity, thirty per cent of the school population was Italian and thirty-five per cent Greek. Few Australians were around. The standards of general literacy were absolutely appalling and the failure rate at the HSC examinations was over ninety-five per cent.

Yet, as is often the case in ghetto schools, the atmosphere was cheerful and very vibrant. In some areas, Fitzroy High excelled: at the state competition in modern European languages, for instances—especially French and Italian—and at soccer championships, although the school team was often excluded from them because of the rowdy behaviour of its supporters. They were known to charge the field in cases of unfavourable results for their team. We all loved the school and also we knew of nothing better in the new land. Later on, as I attended the Australian National University and heard my former high school described as the worst in the country, I reacted defensively and took the issue quite personally. We were not bad, either academically or as human beings. We were just disadvantaged as 'new' Australians with enormous language difficulties and a chronic lack of resources. Like the characters in Rosa Capiello's *Oh Lucky Country!* we were stuck in the inner cities and knew nothing of Australia other than what the inner city showed us: it was a country of immigrants, speaking bad English and playing great soccer.

I have great and fond memories of those years. There was a bunch of very politically minded and highly organised teachers linked to the Labor Party. You must remember that this was the period leading up to the historic victory of Gough Whitlam's 'It's Time' Labor campaign. The local Labor Party was extremely interested in the conditions, and the vote of migrants. Jim Seal, the senior history teacher, and Jack Miller, Fitzroy High School headmaster, were the leading figures in a movement that was deeply committed to improving both the performance and the image of the school. Jim Seal made this position known publicly in a statement in which he condemned the state of dereliction of inner-suburban schools.¹ He stated that this, rather than progressive programs such as sex education, was the main priority for the times.

These progressive teachers helped the migrant students by anticipating, with generosity, what was later to become the official policy of 'multiculturalism'. For instance, they relaxed some of the more 'colonial' aspects of Australian education, such as the obligation to listen to the national anthem during the Monday morning general assembly. They allowed instead for the national anthems of all the different nationalities represented at the school to be played. The official school uniform was also a problem, especially for the European and other migrant students who were used to looking 'normal' in their home country. The use of the school uniform remained a prerequisite and rules concerning the wearing of the tie were relaxed—but only in exceptionally high temperatures of one hundred degrees or more.

I must say, however, that one point on which consensus was never reached was the length of the girls' uniforms, the hems of which showed the distinct tendency to recede progressively close to the forbidden zone between the knee-caps and the pelvic area. I recognised myself in the experience described by Jill Kerr

Conway's *The Road from Coorain*. Appalled by the wrong accents and the irreverent manners of her school mates at the local state school, Conway is quickly moved to an expensive private school. Although she complains that this move cut her off from genuine Australian working-class culture, Conway concludes

On the other hand, had I learned the earthy irreverence in my school days, it would have ruled out the appreciation of high culture in any form.²

My experience, from the bottom up, proves rather the contrary. It is really doing the middle classes too much honour to grant them monopoly over the appreciation of the finer things in life. Obviously, whereas in Australia in the fifties, the cultural differences that Conway registers so intensely are class-based, by the seventies, they included explicit differences of ethnicity and nationality. That the fate of the native Australians was never mentioned at all is shocking enough. Nonetheless, among the raucous and irreverent students of Fitzroy High, the respect for high culture was alive and well, especially for the migrant children who had a classical European education. It just so happens that, for us, high culture did not coincide, as it did for white Australia, with a faithful imitation of British culture, any more than sport coincided with cricket. We were migrants, not colonial Aussies. To equate this difference with the absence of culture is one of the blind spots in the heart of white Australia.

Helen Garner was a teacher in the junior classes so I never had lessons from her. I heard a lot about her from my brother, who was a first former: she was rather straightforward and very 'Anglo', that is, a cool sort of person. She had a reputation as one of the 'lefties' in the school, that is to say, one of those

teachers who were to the left of the Labor Party. As the best and most helpful teachers in the school were Labor Party members, she was definitely the mainstream. There were quite a few of those lefties teaching at Fitzroy High. Some of them were reputedly gay, or suspected of being bisexual, but nobody knew for sure.

Contrary to the repressive and prudish ways of most suburban Melbourne high schools in the early seventies, Fitzroy High was raucously open about sexuality. This was partly a class phenomenon: the *lumpenproletariat* is not known for its capacity to subliminate. That there was a direct proportional link between failure rates at the HSC and early female sexual activity at the school was clear to all. Ethnicity and religion also played their part. The fact that so many of the boys were of southern European origins gave a Mediterranean flair to the everyday machismo that dominated the playgrounds and the locker rooms. Southern European-style Catholicism also allowed for a display of sexuality that was unheard of in the Melbourne of those days, where Irish-style Catholicism dominated.

You must add to this the public perception of a ghetto school and of its students. Italian, Greek and Yugoslav girls were 'sluts' *a priori*, simply because of their 'different' origins that so offended the sensibility of white Australia. Melbourne newspapers never failed to report the smallest accidents that occurred at school, be it theft, a fist-fight, a stink-bomb dropped in a cinema on a school outing, or sex in the lavatories. This was *not* the sort of school where sexual repression was the main political issue.

In the context of the 'It's Time' Labor Party electoral campaign, Jim Seal and others developed a plan to help out both the school and its migrant student population. I know that later on Jim Seal wrote a report on this issue for the State government.

What we migrant students did, in the course of 1972, was to set up the school's first Migrant Parents and Teachers Association in which my mother, Bruna, participated. The headmaster, Jack Miller, initiated this most innovative measure and mostly Italian parents responded. This is a normal measure in most middle-class, white schools but a very complicated one in a place like Fitzroy High where there was no *lingua franca* to connect the different families, let alone a common sense of citizenship to unify them and allow them to identify with a political platform.

Most of us were not Australian citizens anyway, so it took a lot of organisation, campaigning and motivation to get those migrant parents to attend the evening meetings. We started with the usual sort of things like gastronomical exchanges. How right Meaghan Morris was to remark, years later, that multiculturalism has a lot to do with cooking smells and foreign food!

By 1973, when the Garner scandal was out and more political clout was needed on our part, the Migrant Parents and Teachers Association was integrated into the first official Parents and Teachers Association of Fitzroy High School. This committee, which campaigned for and voted unanimously for the dismissal of Garner, was one of the few positive outcomes of that period for migrant students and their parents.

Back in 1972, however, senior students took another initiative: active campaigning with the Labor Party to attract attention to the financial problems of the school. This was quite a complex task because Fitzroy High was not the only school in the area, let alone in the country, with these sorts of problems—low motivation, non-existent achievement, unruly behaviour, etc. In those years, a sort of competition for resources developed among the different schools. I remember Brunswick High as the eternal competitors. So what we

decided to do was to imitate the cultural strategies of Soccorso Rosso, the left-wing Italian organisation, and we set up a migrant students' theatre group. This was in the spirit of cultural action for freedom. The cultural services of the Italian Consulate also helped.

The Parents and Teachers Association now had a focus and a purpose. Raising funds for the performance of Pirandello's *La Giara* kept a whole generation of Italian students, including my brother Gus, off the streets for a while (though not long enough). Campaigning for money for our theatre play, we were also petitioning for our school. We were trying to prove to mainstream Australia that we were as intellectually talented and culturally competent as anybody else. We had not been given a chance to succeed in a society that was still caught up in outdated notions of Anglo-Saxon superiority. An uphill struggle if ever there was one but we fought valiantly on. The performance of the Pirandello play was a smash hit: the newspapers had something positive to report about the school and thankfully they did. *Il Globo*, the Italian-language newspaper, greeted it as a sign of the coming-of-age of our community. Spirits were high.

In the meantime, a group of senior students, mostly Italian girls, were handpicked and specially groomed by Jim Seal and other senior teachers to succeed in the HSC examination. The thinking behind this was that if we could actually show to the world some positive results in the final examination, then the myth of the intellectual inferiority of Southern European migrants could be politically challenged with more ease. You must keep in mind what the actual failure rate of the school was at this time.

The candidates for the HSC worked extra hours—my biggest problem was learning the language fast enough to sit for those exams in December 1972. The teachers put in an

enormous amount of overtime. We did special trial exams and the lot. Once again, nothing special by normal middle-class high school standards but absolutely exceptional for a ghetto school, and without precedent in Fitzroy High's history. We were also strategically advised as to which subjects to choose for the HSC. I picked very judiciously: French and Italian as well as History as my optional subjects. The big hurdle, however, was the two English examinations.

In all this, the cultural action for freedom group and the extra efforts to train migrant students to pass the examinations, Helen Garner shone mostly by her absence. As a junior form teacher, she had other responsibilities; in the light of what happened afterwards, however, I'd say that she simply had other interests.

The sixth-formers sat for the examinations in December 1972, just as the articles in *Digger* paved the way for what became the controversy over sex in the classrooms of Fitzroy High. A record number of us passed that year and were admitted to university. I got five straight As, including English Expression and English Literature, and came in the top five in the state. I was awarded a Special Distinction in Italian and History and one for General Excellence. I was offered a National Undergraduate Scholarship and a place at the new Australian National University in Canberra.

The press campaign that followed the publication of the results marked a turning point in my personal history but also in the collective history of Fitzroy High. Articles in the *Age* and the *Sun*, radio and local TV interviews, and 3UZ presented me with the Nicest Listener Award for outstanding scholastic achievement. I had no training in media work but I surely had to learn.

The important thing here is that my personal success was inextricably linked to the success of the collective campaign we had all set up on behalf of our school. I was not the only

success story, in fact. Others succeeded and it felt like an oppressive cloud of doom was lifted from the school. That it could be done was now beyond a trace of doubt. Events went very fast from there on: we were gaining esteem in the popular press and it was a good moment for us all.

Then came the Labor Party landslide victory and euphoria was in the air. Our efforts on behalf of the school paid off. In the medium term we received a large government grant to build new library premises—to the delight of the much beloved librarian, Mrs Anderson. For a while at least, generations of inner city migrant students enjoyed the fruits of our political labour. With the gentrification process gathering momentum, of course, the children of yuppies who bought out Fitzroy ended up getting more out of the new school resources than the new migrants who moved out to the western suburbs. But that is the irony of urban politics and zoning. Today Fitzroy High School has been closed and turned into a TAFE college.

The timing of the Garner dismissal was uncanny. The media campaign about the first generation of successful Fitzroy High HSC examinations took place in the middle of the Garner scandal. Those of us who had campaigned all year round in the hope of improving the image of the school saw our efforts shattered in one blow. We felt betrayed and dispossessed of our political standpoint. Our own views on what the school needed were reduced to irrelevance. It actually hurt. I have always believed that the school authority acted with lightning speed to dismiss Garner precisely to prevent an escalation of the bad publicity. That was about the last thing anybody in their right mind needed at Fitzroy High, especially the students. In my view, Garner turned the situation to her best advantage, using the publicity to pursue her own agenda

which was simply unrelated to the political priorities and the human situation of the school.

The Parents and Teachers Association backed the school authorities each step of the way in the dismissal process. Contrary to her protestations, Garner had no support in the school whatsoever. We were very glad to see the back of her leaving our premises, I can tell you that much! But, of course, the negative publicity that she triggered afterwards hurt us all.

To put it in a contemporary perspective, there was a contest for media attention over Fitzroy High between, on the one hand, the militants for a 'positive' image of the school—mostly migrant students and the ethnic parents' association, backed by sympathetic teachers with ALP links. On the other hand, there were those who were quite happy to confirm Fitzroy High's disastrous image in a context where 'times were a-changing' and standards were negotiable anyway. Garner belonged to the latter.

The Parents and Teachers Association of Fitzroy High School, including the ethnic parents and my own mother, who already spoke excellent English, complained about two articles published by Helen Garner in *Digger*. One was anonymous and reported a class discussion about sexuality in a first form class at Fitzroy High; the other, in her own name, was a personal account of her own tentative bisexuality. The charges against her were of running unauthorised sex education classes; using explicit four-letter words; and talking much too enthusiastically about homosexuality and bisexuality in the classroom.

Garner sued for unfair and improper procedure and her statements were duly reported in the *Secondary Teacher* in terms of 'a case of extreme victimisation' of a teacher who was given no adequate representation or opportunity to justify the alleged offence'.³ Even the *Age* spoke of 'an illiberal response

to the prominence of "long-haired" and politically radical teachers in our schools'.⁴ The teachers took up her case as an example of the repression of innovative, left-wing members by the State government. The issue that became discursively articulated was that of academic freedom and classroom politics: 'Do teachers have civil rights?'⁵ No other discourse was taken into account, let alone circulated.

After the Victorian Secondary Teachers Association took up the Garner case and inflated it to emblematic proportions, the stage was set for a confrontation between libertarian teachers and the repressive old guard of the Victorian Secondary Education Department. The ALP supported the teachers' demands for fair procedures for the dismissal of both temporary and permanent teachers.

As one reads through the issues of the *Secondary Teacher* for 1973, one can measure the full extent of the Garner scandal and the huge impact it had on public debates at the time and not only in the field of education, of course. The satirical cartoons targeted the prude and the repressed. Even with the advantage of hindsight, it is very difficult not to feel that the brunt of those jokes was born by those Fitzroy High kids and their 'backward and sexually repressed' parents, who were the allies of the conservative education authorities. I will return to this.

Meanwhile, the controversy over the articles Garner had written in *Digger* inflamed the inner-city communists and other leftists, especially the Women's Liberation Movement, who embraced Garner as the symbol of sexual freedom. As one of the editorials suggested:

the classroom is the concentration of the insanity of the whole system. Tell yourself 'I am not a teacher,' give the kids breathing space to see something of what they are and what life is.⁶

The Victorian Secondary Teachers Association also saw the Garner case as a fight against sexism in the classroom and in education in general.⁷ The sexual politics of the case became the overriding consideration in what had shaped up as a fight among Australians over the rights of migrants who were themselves quite absent and silenced. Nobody stopped to think for a minute about the state and the needs of those migrant students of Fitzroy High. The whole circus was played out on our backs, without so much as an attempt being made to hear us out. It was just a case of Old Aussie Left versus New Aussie Left.

In other words, Garner managed, with the fortuitous assistance of historical circumstances, to turn her hasty dismissal from Fitzroy High into a general civil rights case that mobilised the progressive militant teachers throughout the state. Rallies, petitions, demonstrations, strikes were threatened and sometimes even executed. Demonstrators merged the specific Garner case with the general anti-authoritarian wind of the 1970s. The dreary clichés of the class-war, combined with the euphoric certainties of the war of the sexes, produced an inebriating cocktail, where academic freedom blended with workers' solidarity and with feminist sisterhood in the pursuit of 'liberation now!'

It was, in short, a perfect match. Too bad that it was consolidated on and sealed by the exclusion—in both material and symbolic ways—of the non-white, the non-Australian, the non-educated of the very institution—Fitzroy High—where Garner had attempted to practise what she will go on preaching for decades: liberation and freedom (now!).

This is the—rather irresistible—mix which Garner poured into her literary engine. From the ruins of her teaching career at Fitzroy High, she managed to jump-start one of the most spectacular climbs to the status of cultural icon that Australia has seen since Germaine Greer. In 1972–73, Garner was the

heroine of the highly self-assured, albeit utterly chaotic, left-wing ideology that ruled the inner city of Melbourne. In return, these combined political passions provided both the framework and the fuel for Garner's own projects. All she has ever written, with grace and moderate talent, are thinly disguised chronicles of her times.

Garner's work is often described, for instance in *Who's Who in Australia*, as 'morally austere' and ample comments are made on her stringent morality and her compassionate accounts of destructive situations and people. I find this a flattering portrayal. I would rather speak of a gentle but steady consumption of other people's lives, experiences, features, names and pain for the purpose of nurturing her writing. I feel a great dislike of this, but not without ambivalence. Working with and in language myself, I know about the thin dividing line between reality and representation. Let me put it this way, then: good artists are major cannibals who consume others in one big chunk that steals their essence away. Mediocre artists are vampires who bleed their beloved victims over prolonged periods of time so gently that they hardly notice it at first. In my opinion, Garner is no cannibal.

Pansexuality revisited⁸

For a critique of libertarian feminism, you should really start by reading Garner's report on Fitzroy High in *Digger*.⁹ This is reprinted, with an updated postscript, in *True Stories*. It reports the (in)famous class discussion with her first formers about bi/sexuality. What strikes me is the collectivist fantasy that Garner pursues. For instance, she stresses over and over again that it was the students themselves who had initiated the discussion by asking her questions. All she did was to answer them.

Moreover, Garner justified the use of four-letter words in order to be on the same level (of inarticulate expression) as her mostly migrant students, so as to be understood by them.¹⁰ There may have been white Australian students in the classroom, but the anonymous report only names explicitly the migrant children, using their real life names so as to add a touch of 'authenticity' to the scene.¹¹

Garner comments, with barely contained emotion, on the warmth and tenderness of the children during this discussion. That she genuinely liked the school was testified by Jack Miller, who left the school in 1976 but always kept in touch with my parents in Hampton. The former headmaster told me recently that Garner still occasionally attended Fitzroy High reunions, just for old times' sake. This sort of *flânerie*, which at times appeared to us as a way of revisiting the scene of the crime, was one of the more curious habits of Garner—a sort of hangover from her days at *Digger*. That the human warmth of the Fitzroy High students is a fundamental point for Garner can be seen also in the postscript to the re-edition of the article, where the author again stresses the Mediterranean quality of genuine affection of these kids:

The bluntness of the language, mine and theirs, obscures the delicacy and the urgency of their inquiry, the warmth and the sweetness and gentle curiosity of the glances that passed between girls and boys, across a divide where coarse jocularity and abuse had always been the common currency.¹²

It may have taken her years of hard-won experience, Jungian therapy, literary and financial success to learn to phrase things as beautifully as that. Already in the botched Fitzroy High affair, however, Garner had expressed her unconditional

adoration for Eros, that 'egalitarian sexual flow that can't be legislated against'.

The flip side of the coin of Garner's pansexualist romanticism is the fact that she also depicts her migrant subjects as not being leading lights intellectually, as speaking bad English and having brutally ill-educated parents. This catalogue of miseries, let alone the generous spirit of the revolution that blows through Garner's words, justifies the need to give them sex education against their deprived and repressive background.

The descriptions of the migrant children in this article strike me as even more offensive now than they did back in the seventies. Take Angelo, for instance, with his volatile and sympathetic Italian face, 'making violent rabbit-like fucking motions with his hips; Georgia's blushing and smiling at me sideways, Paul has his head on his arms with only his hysterical eyes peeping up to me'. Then there is Drago, 'his broad Yugoslavian face shy and sweaty with the effort of speedy writing'.¹³

Garner loves those children, but finds them in sad need of enlightenment from her Anglo-Australian wisdom as a sexual radical. She simultaneously drinks up their warmth and curiosity and spits it out: she despises their broken English and their general ignorance. The author is overcome with emotion at the sight of such humanity, all too human in far too many ways:

Oh, Georgia, oh, Rita, I look at their open, eager faces and think of how their Greek fathers beat them for talking to boys in the street and how they are not allowed to go to Church when they have their period.¹⁴

The Greek girls emerge from this piece as the prototype of Mediterranean backwardness; the boys score a bit better because they evoke in the author a sort of tender pansexual-

ism, which was to become the trademark of Garner's subsequent 'style'. Naive or disingenuous, she appeals to the complicity of her first formers, in letting them lock the doors of the classroom and in asking them NOT to report their class discussion:

I tell them that I'll get the sack if it gets round that I've been saying fuck and cunt in the classroom.¹⁵

One of the boys helps her destroy the incriminating evidence of the notes on which they had written the sex questions. A climate of erotic complicity has set in between her and the boys in the class; as for the girls, that's another matter.

The style of this article is a sort of erotic orientalism, which is typical of the libertarian feminism of the seventies. Everything in this text, the plot, the lexicon, the positioning of the author and her imagined readers voices the needs, dreams and aspirations of white Australian women born and raised on the 'white Australia policy'. It is a paradoxical mix: Garner is utterly ethnocentric and blissfully unaware of her own ignorance about those 'others' whom she glorifies in her account as warm and tender and receptive to her words. It is a sort of disqualification through excessive adoration, which may simply be a softer form of the objectification of the 'others'. I asked my mother last week if she ever reads Garner's books. She replied: 'I tried, but she writes for the Aussies, she has nothing to say to me.'

'Authenticity', 'liberation', 'pleasure' and 'joy' are the words that recur most often in Garner's account of her exchange with her students. It reads like a manual of Marcuse-style activity, which I find rather naive in these Foucauldian days of post-sexual liberation politics. It is quite moving—and amusing—to see to what extent, in the *Digger* articles, the truth

about one's self rests with sexuality and sexual liberation, expressed by the white emancipated female writer. I can only be thankful for poststructuralism and deconstruction, that came like a tidal wave at the end of the seventies and swept away all this rhetoric of liberation and introduced, instead, the rigour of a new kind of self-reflexivity for critical intellectuals. But that's another story as well.

This rhetoric of universal liberation, also known as left-wing humanism, is of course typical of the left-wing politics of those days and it marks a very specific phase in white Australian feminism. This can be seen clearly in a comment on Garner's article that was published in the following issue of *Digger*, in which she was criticised for being too heterosexual and for failing to point out the potential for homosexuality in her classroom.¹⁶ In her response Garner, a convinced follower of the politics of experience, admitted that she had failed to come to terms with her homosexuality and had, consequently, settled in an uneasy bisexuality, which she was unable to convey to her students. She concludes with the hope, however, that now that 'the channels are open' between her and the students, the truth can emerge. As Meaghan Morris put it, in a not altogether unrelated context, 'the truth is out there...'—it's just a question of setting the conditions of possibility for its unfolding.¹⁷ The problem with Garner's generation is they thought they were in charge of the process of historical unfolding of *the* truth. That turned out to be their downfall.

Garner displays, in fact, the most disconcerting disregard for the specific locations of those students: their 'difference' is not an issue for her, except as a sign of social and cultural backwardness, which she is determined to straighten out. No insight about their ethnic, religious or cultural backgrounds is so much as suggested: they get simply flattened out in the most banal rendition of migrants' sexual and political oppression.

Being dismissed as sexually ignorant, the migrant parents and their children were then lumped into a more generalised form of ignorance: poor but picturesque English ('Why does women...'), bad manners, general cultural deprivation. The one and only virtue Garner grants us is our warmth, our spontaneity, our tenderness.

Following this, Garner imposes single-mindedly upon them her own model of sexual liberation, as if it were the norm. Later on, she gets upset when she discovers that her norm is not to the general liking. Privileging her views of sexual liberation over everything else in a universalising and patronising gesture, Garner at the age of thirty already shows her inability to think in terms of differences, be it of age, ethnicity, religion or nation, or of cultural values. But then, so did the whole of the Australian Left at the time, including the feminist groups. Their passion allowed for no flexibility: Eros may be fluid but the road to the revolution was one-way only.

As I said earlier, Garner was not the only leftie teacher who used Fitzroy High as an experimental ground: there were many others who fished around the miserable school yard, following their own political or existential whims. In this regard, the ALP-based teachers who supported our actions as senior students determined to help out the school were also acting out of political conviction. It just so happens that their purposes coincided entirely with ours. This made for a reasoned and mutual agreement, not for a romanticised rendition of classroom politics.

The position and positioning of 'the migrants' in the Garner case

While the migrant students of Fitzroy High are portrayed entirely through Garner's eyes in the *Digger* and other reports, the migrant parents are slightly more visible in the controversy, mostly through the ethnic members of the Parents and

Teachers Association of Fitzroy High. Many of the official reports, especially from the *Secondary Teacher*, mention the great care taken by Fitzroy High authorities to keep the scandal out of the Italian and Greek communities and their respective newspapers. Those of us senior students who had been engaged in a political struggle to improve our image and consequently our chances, tried as best we could to keep the scandal out of the papers—that was really the last thing we needed at the time. Discretion was very important here and one of the adjectives most commonly used to describe Garner's behaviour at the time was 'indiscreet'.

Garner reacted violently against this emphasis on discretion, which in her mind merely added insult to injury. She wanted to know the names of the people who had brought charges against her. She suspected the school authorities of having done it directly, never seriously contemplating the possibility that her own students may have leaked the information. She also never seemed to realise, or make anything of the fact, that the Parents and Teachers Association had unanimously voted for her dismissal, not out of sexual prudery, but out of a genuine disgust at the manipulative manner in which Garner conducted those classes.

As a matter of fact, the minute the last of the two sex classes by Garner were over, the whole school was buzzing with gossip about the extraordinary events in Form 1E. The hearsay inflated the accounts out of all proportion, of course, contributing to a sort of obsession about what *really* happened in there. My own brother, a first former at the time in the neighbouring form of 1F, could not even get the story straight. The only thing that was absolutely clear was that the whole school was talking about it. In this context, Garner's statement that, after the sex classes, there followed two perfectly normal

months of school work, 'as if' nothing had happened, is disingenuous to say the least.¹⁸

When headmaster Jack Miller suggested that her sort of radical sexual politics should be carried on in other, more 'trendy joints', Garner dismissed it as further evidence of the conservatism of the school authorities. What she failed to appreciate or even acknowledge was the extent to which the vast majority of migrant students in the school shared Jack Miller's views. The sexual liberation project was *not* top priority in a school that was beyond the pale by all scholastic and social standards.

The feeling of being abused and taken advantage of was very strong and it became a sort of common denominator that mobilised different elements of the migrants' communities—the parents, the students and other citizens. It is the one point in the editorial in *Il Globo* that I still agree with today.¹⁹ The otherwise conservative Nino Randazzo makes a couple of valid points against Garner: first, the ease with which she uses the real names of her migrant students in an article that she preferred to keep anonymous. Second, Randazzo complains that Fitzroy High was being used as the dumping ground for the 'beat generation' teachers who wanted to practise their objectionable ideals. Why do they not run these radical experiments in the respectable schools of the pampered white middle-class Australians who all pass the HSC examination and gain admission to higher education? Why abuse those who are already so disadvantaged?

Not surprisingly, *Il Globo* defends the honour of the migrants, but also their simple right to an education and to being given a chance to succeed in the closed and rather prejudiced Australian society. Inevitably, this ends up confirming the picture of the migrants as conservative and sexually repressed. This is how the *Age* reports it, expressing special concern about

the reaction of the Italian community.²⁰ As voiced by *Il Globo*, up to eighty-seven per cent of Italian parents would be opposed to that sort of sex education being given in schools. The polarisation of positions is by now complete and it works entirely on ethnic or racialised lines: the migrants' voice, embodied in the Italian community, is constructed as arch-conservative and anti-sex; whereas the Australian Left comes across as degenerate and lascivious but politically progressive.

Oblivious to the pitfalls of these discursive polarisations, Garner contributes to the picture of the backward and sex-hating migrants. In Garner's discourse, the migrants are not valid interlocutors because they are dismissed, *a priori*, as sexually repressed and consequently the natural allies of that prudish and puritanical Australia which the sexual radicals were hell-bent on overthrowing (if possible 'now!'). Never mind the fact that most of those migrants had not even gained access to Australian citizenship rights and practices yet: for Garner and her generation, they were to drop out even before they got in.

In 1972, Garner wrote:

There is an obvious link-up here with the women's liberation movement. My own experience with consciousness-raising ... was one of the important changes of my life. I don't expect to feel again with such immediate intensity the meaning of the word: 'sister', but I hope I never lose the openness to other women that these sessions engendered in me. Whole layers of defence and fear were stripped away.²¹

By the nineties she'd lost it.

In 1972–73, Garner launched a political campaign for sexual liberation and self-determination against the Victorian Secondary School system, on behalf of migrants, women and

other oppressed of the earth. In the nineties, she reneged on the lot and turned against the political efforts by younger women to fight for self-determination, which she interprets as 'politically correct' in the dogmatic sense of the term. As Ann Curthoys points out in her acute analysis, whereas in the US the backlash against the alleged political correctness of feminism is orchestrated by the traditional enemies of feminism, in Australia the backlash is coming from within the feminist movement and it takes the unfortunate form of a generational war.²² In this Garner is, in my opinion, the great loser. Not only because she picked a disastrously wrong case through which to express her admirable libertarian sentiments. Not even because she showed her utter ignorance of and inexperience with institutional politics. But rather because she displayed the extent of her distance from feminism today, the loss of that openness and connection about which she wrote so eloquently in the seventies. A great loss.

There is, moreover, something pathetic about feminists aging badly. Garner rejects younger feminists as if she had the right to judge them, or the monopoly on libertarian feminism. As a teacher working in the university with much younger women and with an intense experience of institutional politics, I am disappointed by the picture Garner draws of the next generation as embittered and hateful traitors to her own idealised image of herself as a sexual anarchist. That is as egocentric a view of the next generation as one can have. Garner, like others in her generation, fails to appreciate the vitality, wit and energy of the riot girls, cyber chicks and the geek and other girls of today.

Another problem with the libertarian generation is that, because of their confrontational politics, they refuse to recognise the power they have acquired themselves. Caught up in their fantasy of 're-presenting' the oppressed, they have become blind to their own position. They refuse to see,

for instance, that for younger women feminism can be perceived as the mainstream. Post-punk politics shaped these younger women's political sensibility. They came of age politically in post-Whitlam Australia, in the economic uncertainty after the end of the baby boom and thus in the midst of the cultural hegemony of the baby boomers. To hope for a smooth transition between these two generations is as self-deluding as it is irresponsible.

In this, as well, Garner remains emblematic of her generation. They continue to display the cultural arrogance and the politics of universalising feminism they had already perfected in the seventies, reducing all their opponents to the undesirable status of 'anti-erotic' puritans—in Fitzroy then, as in Ormond College more recently.

The worst aspect of this for me, however, is the illusion of holding the monopoly over the revolution, be it in terms of pansexualism or *the* ideological truth. This should stop before it gets too embarrassing. By the nineties, Garner is flagellating the hordes of (younger) allegedly Stalinist feminists in the name of free speech and sexual freedom, with the same unmediated confidence of her Fitzroy days. This is unsatisfactory, not because of poststructuralism, not because of Foucault, not because of wanting to avoid Oedipal struggles among women, but because of a more basic respect for the lessons of history. The monolithic ideology that holds one and only one truth to be acceptable, has shown its limitations over and over again and it died definitely in 1989. Let us learn from its demise and, gently but firmly, move on.

I was not with Garner in 1972 and am not with her in 1997. I know and accept the iconic status she has gained as the symbol for a whole generation of white Australians who identify with libertarian sexual anarchy. I find it rather comical—in a tragic way—that, by the mid-nineties, the great battle for liber-

tarian sexual politics was reduced for Garner to the highly inappropriate defence of the sexual antics of a generation of middle-aged men.

But that is not my point. The point I want to make is to restate the difference of my position from both of Garner's (vintage 72 or 95) and from the libertarian feminism she incarnates. None of it is my story, either as a Fitzroy High student or, later, as a feminist scholar working on difference. I want to restate the position of a migrant feminist who literally had no place to speak from in 1972 and even less in 1997. People like me have the option of being the objects of Garner's accounts, literary or journalistic, or being left out altogether. So much for libertarianism. It turns out to be just another self-aggrandising form of left-wing universalism that has seen its day. The only people who still need this sort of thing are the dying white males whose crisis is terminal.

It's noteworthy that Garner managed to carve out her agenda from the disastrous Ormond College affair and a second best-seller. After the Fitzroy High scandal she did not do badly either: she became the editor of *Digger* by March 1973 and moved in the circuit of literary grants that led up to her first best-seller, *Monkey Grip*. In this long and rather interesting trajectory, Garner did not modify her tactics or her style: the migrants and the other oppressed remain the signifying monkeys whom she holds firmly in her grip—till they spill out their truth over the page that she invariably signs on their behalf.

Conclusion: let us change the agenda and look at the mutual imbrication of whiteness and sexual libertarianism in the work of Garner's generation. Let us check this against the politics of multiculturalism and the accounts provided by migrants themselves. Let us analyse the role that ethnocentrism and nationalism played in Australian feminist politics. Let us study the extent to which the radical left of the

seventies provided a relay-team through which white Australia could renew itself and carry on its hegemony.

I wholeheartedly second Ann Curthoys and many others who call for the development of a feminism that is attentive to the racist legacies of the colonial past and the neocolonial practices of today. The need to dislodge the hegemony of white Australian liberationists is more acute today than ever before.

By sheer coincidence, in one of the back issues of *Digger* I read for this essay, I spotted an article by Eileen Haley, significantly called 'Colours'. This article is about the importance of thinking through colour privileges and the cultural positionings they entail. This was written in the middle of the Garner affair in 1972. I suggest that we read it again and simply start from there.

I hesitated a great deal before writing up my fragmented memories of the Fitzroy High days, partly because that is one of the most painful periods of my life and one which I recall with little pleasure. Part of it, however, has to do with the great difficulty of finding a place from where I can voice my own experiences of those days. I hope that it is clear by now that the effect of the Garner affair and the subsequent press campaign was a massive silencing of people like me, my mother, my brother and all those who became pawns in the struggle between Old and New Aussie Lefts. We saw the specificity of our own political efforts diminished, if not dismissed.

I also wanted to make sure that I found, amidst the turmoil of conflicting emotions that the period raises in me, a firm ground of compassion out of which I could try to organise the series of events. That is not as easy as it sounds, when emotions are strong.

Part of my difficulty is also due to the split loyalties I experience in this case. My whole work is based on difference

and on differences among women. So I have the one relief of seeing to what extent my theoretical framework offers an alternative to the monological discursive economy of Garner's generation. I have also written extensively about 'the philosophy of *as if*' and the need to represent multiple subject positions within each subject and not only between subjects. That is a sort of help because it allows me to accept my own inner contradictions and hesitations.

But that is not enough, of course. I experience a sort of dizzy sensation, as options and positions multiply in front of my eyes. Let me list some:

— as a feminist, I am closer to Garner than I will ever be to *Il Globo's* Randazzo and company;

— as a teacher, I have immense respect for the Seals and the Millers of this world and I am extremely critical of Garner's pedagogy;

— as an Italian migrant, I feel offended and abused by the portrayal of my parents as backward and ignorant;

— as a New Australian, I feel silenced and misunderstood;

— as a sexually polymorphous individual, I share Garner's erotic subtlety. I too see myself as an individual who does not fix her sexuality in any one normative model (thus corresponding to Freud's definition of the average human being as being 'polymorphous and perverse');

— as a poststructuralist, I despise Garner's feeble-minded pansexualism;

— as a migrant, I object to orientalism, objectification and the glories of being turned into a fetish and an other;

— as a sexual-difference feminist, I reject the confrontational logic of the libertarian war of the sexes;

— as a Lacanian, I object to the simplified and hasty

'reconciliations' between the metaphysical sexualised halves of one wholesome humanity;

— as a Nietzschean, I reject the lukewarm humanism of those who have nothing else to offer but good sentiments;

— as a nomadic intellectual, I am opposed to nationalistic and ethnocentric mind sets;

— as a Deleuzian, I am not interested in Oedipal intra-generational wars, especially among feminists;

— as a writer, I have problems with those who act in the name of...the Truth, or the Father, or the Holy anything;

— as a former Fitzroy High student, my first reaction when I read about Garner and the Ormond College affair was: 'Oh no, she has done it again!'

And as the person who is signing this essay because she is committed to the infinite task of excavating her memories and translating them into signifying practices, I have to say that I am ultimately happy to be engaged in this exchange. With the help of the editor of the book, my family and later, readers, the tightly sealed doors of a very difficult but also very exciting time have been opened again—not entirely, of course, but just enough for me to begin to look through the kaleidoscope of events that should never have amounted to *one* hegemonic truth valid for all. Then as now, the faces and the voices of feminism were multiple and diverse. Now as then, this joyful dissonance is what gives feminism its life-changing energy. The rest is silence.

United States District Court jury in San Francisco found Malcolm had not libelled Masson even though she had been unable to produce the notebooks containing the disputed quotes. On 25 August 1995, though, the *New York Times* reported that Malcolm's granddaughter had by chance found the missing notebook hidden in a bookshelf. The quotes were all there.

22 See page vii of William Howarth's introduction to *The John McPhee Reader*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 1976.

Sexual Harassment: Where Did it Go in 1995? Jenny Morgan
1 Sandra S. Berns, 'The Hobart City Council Case: A tort of sexual harassment for Tasmania?', *University of Tasmania Law Review*, 13 (1994) 412.

2 'Gender bias and the Law', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 June 1996.

3 Paul McGeough, 'Shhhhhh money', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 June 1996, p. 17.

4 Catharine MacKinnon, *Sexual Harassment of Working Women*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1979.

5 For a discussion of equality and its limited understanding, see Margaret Thornton, *The Liberal Promise Anti-Discrimination Legislation in Australia*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1990.

6 See my article in Margaret Thornton (ed.), *Public and Private: Feminist Legal Debates*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1995.

7 See Adrian Howe, "Social Injury" revisited: Towards a feminist theory of social justice', 15 (1987) 423, *International Journal of the Sociology of Law*, and Regina Graycar and Jenny Morgan, *The Hidden Gender of Law*, The Federation Press, Leichhardt, 1990, ch. 11.

8 For a bleak view on this issue, see Margaret Thornton,

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9 Helen Garner, *The First Stone*, Pan Macmillan, Sydney, 1995, p. 221.

10 Carol Smart, *Law, Crime and Sexuality: Essays in Feminism*, Sage, London, 1995, p. 223.

11 *ibid.*, pp. 222-3.

12 Margaret Thornton, *Dissonance and Distrust: Women in the Legal Profession*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1996, p. 262.

13 Thornton, *Public and Private*, pp. 198-9.

14 Susan James, 'The good-enough citizen: female citizenship and independence' in Gisela Bock and Susan James (ed.),

Beyond Equality and Difference, Routledge, London, 1992, p. 60.

15 Drucilla Cornell, *The Imaginary Domain: Abortion, Pornography and Sexual Harassment*, Routledge, New York, 1995, p. 10.

16 *ibid.*, p. 170.

17 Agency is discussed in Kathryn Abrams, 'Sex wars redux:

Agency & coercion in feminist legal theory', 95 (1995) 304, *Columbia Law Review*.

18 Jenna Mead, 'Sexual harassment and feminism: Jenna Mead talks to Amanda Lohrey, *RePublica: The New Land Lies Before Us*, no. 2, HarperCollins, Sydney, 1995.

19 Abrams, p. 366.

20 Cornell, p. 220.

Remembering Fitzroy High Rosi Braidotti

1 James T. Seal, 'Offering services we can't provide', *Secondary Teacher*, 185, May 1973, p. 10.

2 Jill Kerr Conway, *The Road from Coorain*, New York, Vintage Books, 1989, p. 95.

3 *Secondary Teacher*, 182, January-February 1973, pp. 11-14.

4 *Age*, 2 March 1973, p. 8.

5 *Secondary Teacher*, 182, January-February 1973, p. 14.

- 6 'Tell yourself: "I am not a teacher"', *Digger*, 11, 27 January-13 February 1973, 2.
- 7 *Secondary Teacher* 182, January-February 1973, 13. See also Jan Bassett, *Matters of Conscience: A History of the Victorian Secondary Teachers' Association*, Pen Folk Publishing, Melbourne, 1995.
- 8 Pansexuality: as an analytical term, it is the belief that sexuality is the prime mover in the constitution of identity and human society. As a normative term, it locates in sexuality the solution or remedy to both individual and social ills. Originally formulated in early psychoanalysis, it was later redefined with the help of Marcuse's libertarian communism. In this world view, Eros is not only essential to the human being, but also a very important political concept for society as a whole. Thus, the theory of 'sexual liberation', which the US feminists adapted from Marcuse's 'Freudo-Marxist' creed, argues that the path to the socialist revolution begins with the subversion of 'normal' sexuality. This theory was severely criticised in the poststructuralist revision of the subversive potential of sexuality and of sexual behaviour. The work of Michel Foucault and, in Australia, Meaghan Morris, is crucial to this critique.
- 9 'Why does the women get all the pain, Miss?', *Digger*, 6, 4-8 November 1972, p. 3.
- 10 One reader thanked her for this in a letter published in *Digger*, 11, 27 January-13 February 1973, p. 1, under the title 'Sex is not a fuck.'
- 11 Garner tries to downplay this unethical anonymity in *True Stories* with the claim that she was 'pathetically easy to trace' p. 36. Her students were more easily traced.
- 12 Helen Garner, *True Stories*, Text Publishing, Melbourne, 1996, p. 37.
- 13 *ibid.*, pp. 32-3.
- 14 *ibid.*, pp. 33.

- 15 *ibid.*, pp. 34.
- 16 *Digger*, 7, 18 November-2 December 1972, p. 1.
- 17 Meaghan Morris, 'The truth is out there,' *Australian Book Review*, 181, June 1996, pp. 17-20.
- 18 Helen Garner, *True Stories*, p. 37.
- 19 Nino Randazzo, *Il Globo*, 6 March 1973.
- 20 *Age*, 2 March 1973.
- 21 Helen Garner, 'Bisexuality: joining the middle', *Digger*, 2-16 December 1972, p. 3.
- 22 Ann Curthoys, 'Helen Garner's *The First Stone*', *Australian Feminist Studies*, 21, Autumn 1995, pp. 203-11.
- 23 Eileen Haley, 'Colours', *Digger*, 12, 1972.

The Taste of Power Elspeth Probyn

- 1 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1997, p. 27.
- 2 Cited in Susan Bordo, 'Anorexia nervosa: Psychopathology as the crystallization of culture', in her *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1993, p. 161.
- 3 Hilde Bruch, *The Golden Cage: The Enigma of Anorexia Nervosa*, Harvard University Press, Harvard, 1978, p. viii.
- 4 Pierre Bourdieu, 'The metamorphosis of tastes', in his *Sociology in Question*, R. Nice (trans.), Sage, London, 1993, p. 108.
- 5 Debra Saltman, *Women & Health: An Introduction to Issues*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Sydney, 1991, p. 122.
- 6 Cited in Virginia Trioli, 'The jealous mother', *Generation f: Sex, Power & The Young Feminist*, Minerva, Melbourne, 1996, p. 137.

Organising Works/Organising Women Alice Blake

- 1 For example, Susan Mitchell, 'Power with passion,' *Weekend*