

Revisiting the Haunted Past: Christine Piper's *After Darkness*

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A FREQUENTLY-USED METAPHOR IN AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL DISCOURSE IS THAT OF ONE or other 'shameful' or 'dark' chapter in our past.¹ Alongside the notion of shame and guilt comes the idea of repressed and silenced memory, either through deliberate institutionalised forgetting or through the impossibility of fully articulating traumatic pasts. At the same time, as Kate Darian-Smith and Paula Hamilton suggest, 'forms of remembering and commemoration have become the central contemporary mode through which various constituencies understand history, including the national past' (371). This seemingly contradictory clash of a willed forgetfulness alongside a fascination with remembrance may account for the popularity in Australian literature of historical novels, a sub-set of which may be termed 'sorry novels,' and of literary works that may be regarded as participating in a process of what Tessa Morris-Suzuki and others in *East Asia Beyond the History Wars: Confronting the Ghosts of Violence* (2013) term 'reconciliation as method'.² This concept is defined 'not as

¹ My thanks to Christine Piper for her email interview (quoted here with permission), and to Prof. Susannah Radstone for her insightful comments on this essay.

² There have been a number of essays on the 'apology novel' or 'sorry novel' including: Frawley and Kossew; Kossew; and Weaver-Hightower. In addition to the novels dealt with by Weaver-Hightower (Peter Carey's *Oscar and Lucinda*, Greg Matthews' *The Wisdom of Stones* and Kate Grenville's *The Secret River*), these essays have considered such novels as Gail Jones's *Sorry*, Kate Grenville's *The Lieutenant* and *Sarah Thornhill* (which together with *The Secret River* form the author's 'Colonial Trilogy') and Richard Flanagan's *Wanting*. Historical novels, or novels that

an end-point in which consensus on history is achieved, but rather as sets of media, skills and processes that encourage the creative sharing of ideas and understandings about the past' (13). The focus on 'creative sharing' suggests that such texts may participate in uncovering 'unfinished business' and in this way contribute to debates about understandings of the past. At the very least, the concept of 'reconciliation as method' prompts us to consider how literary narratives (among other forms of cultural texts) provoke questions of historical responsibility.

There has been a great deal of discussion in Australian literary, historical and cultural studies about the contested nature of apology and reconciliation, much of it centred round debates regarding Kate Grenville's novel *The Secret River* (2005). As Sarah Pinto suggests, 'Australia presents an intriguing case study for the consideration of the historical novel given the visibility, ubiquity and popularity of the genre' (190). Influential and prize-winning novels, such as Grenville's 'Colonial Trilogy', which comprises *The Secret River*, *The Lieutenant* (2008) and *Sarah Thornhill* (2011), Kim Scott's *That Deadman Dance* (2010), Richard Flanagan's *Wanting* (2008), Doris Pilkington Garimara's *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence* (1996) and Alexis Wright's *Plains of Promise* (1997), revisit moments in history where first encounters or intercultural relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians are narrated and problematised with the benefit of hindsight and contemporary understandings. For Sarah Pinto, such historical novels, or novels that deal with the past, are 'a crucial way in which pasts are talked about, written and lived' (200) and in this way contribute to the posing of new questions about the past and engaging with the past 'on emotional terms' (200). In similar terms, Dolores Herrero, in an essay on Gail Jones's *Sorry* (2007), describes the novel as 'yet another example of a recurrent phenomenon in contemporary Australian literature, namely the desperate attempt to heal the anxieties of (un)belonging that haunt settler culture' (286). She quotes Jones's words in an interview with Summer Block: 'I wanted to write about historical amnesia,' Jones says, 'what it means to forget ... to have history with a gap in it' (Herrero 288).

It is precisely this notion of 'historical amnesia' with which Christine Piper's 2014 novel, *After Darkness*, engages. Winner of the 2104 Vogel Literary Award and shortlisted for the 2015 Miles Franklin Award, hers is one of the few novels that has as its focus the World War II Australian civilian internment camps that have been largely forgotten in the Australian national imaginary. Of interest to Piper is the experience of Japanese civilians—or enemy aliens, in the terminology of the time—in Loveday internment camp in remote South Australia

revisit the past, are favoured by Indigenous writers, too, including such examples as Doris Pilkington Garimara's *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence*, Kim Scott's *That Deadman Dance*, Alexis Wright's *Plains of Promise* and *Carpentaria* and Larissa Behrendt's *Home*.

in 1942. The only other novel of which I am aware that deals specifically with Japanese and Japanese-Australian civilian internment and the intercultural relationships that developed in the camps is Cory Taylor's *My Beautiful Enemy* (2013)—also shortlisted for the Miles Franklin Award—which is set in Victoria's Tatura internment camp. There has, to date, been little critical commentary, beyond reviews, on these two novels, coincidentally published within a year of each other.³ This essay focuses on Piper's novel in order to analyse how it deals with the question of 'unfinished business' that relates to the still-largely unacknowledged experiences of civilian internees in Australia as well as to a 'dark chapter' in Japan's war history that has been similarly repressed.

In a comment defining the concept of 'unfinished business', Tessa Morris-Suzuki suggests that 'discarded or suppressed fragments of the past have a tendency to return as ghosts to haunt individuals, communities, nations and international relationships' (19). This ghosting metaphor is crucial to *After Darkness*, which poses for its readers the central question of how literary works, in this case, a novel, may confront the 'ghosts' of violent pasts. It incorporates in its narrative the trope of haunting that, according to Avery Gordon, is able to register harm and loss in a process of 'transformative recognition' (8) rather than of traumatic incapacitation, thus enabling a more affective sharing of past experience that may indeed open up a 'potentially creative space for the rethinking of past violence' (Morris-Suzuki 21). Piper's novel provides such a space.

Narrated in the first person by Japanese doctor, Tomokazu Ibaraki, the novel deploys three locations—Loveday Internment camp in South Australia, Broome in Western Australia and Tokyo—across three different time-spans from 1934 to 1942, alternating among them. The apparently unemotional surface texture of the first-person narration (reminiscent of the understated narrative technique used by Kazuo Ishiguro in his 1989 novel, *The Remains of the Day*)⁴ slowly gives way to a more affective narrative voice. Eventually, the questions that arise regarding Dr Ibaraki's past, hinted at throughout the novel, are slowly excavated through his reluctant remembering, as the different narrative strands are disentangled. The personal shame that Dr Ibaraki is bearing as a traumatic burden, and that he ultimately faces up to, is linked in the novel to national shame (connected both to Japan and to Australia) that emerges slowly, despite efforts to suppress it.

³ Piper herself has published both a prize-winning essay (Piper, 'Unearthing') and a newspaper article (Piper, 'Japanese Internment') on this topic.

⁴ I am grateful to the anonymous reviewer who pointed out this similarity. Ishiguro presents the voice of his narrator/protagonist, the butler Stevens, as initially repressed, reserved and rigidly controlled. Later, he is shown as having moments of self-recognition as he confronts his past. Piper's novel uses a similar narrational device.

Near the beginning of the novel, there is a short description of the landscape that Dr Ibaraki sees on the train journey from Broome, where he has been stationed as a doctor, to the Loveday camp in South Australia where he is about to be interned: 'Dead trees haunted its [the river's] edges, their limbs stretching skywards, as if begging for forgiveness' (3). It is a telling image and one that shadows the novel, reappearing later: 'The hollow trunks of dead trees haunted its edges like lost people' (139). This image of the trees as haunting the landscape and pleading to the heavens for forgiveness is reminiscent of the 'postcolonial uncanny' or 'postcolonial gothic', marked by a haunted Australian landscape that has been most often associated with Indigenous dispossession and white guilt. Thus, Grenville, for example, writes in *The Secret River* of the place where a massacre of Aboriginal people has taken place:

Something had happened to the dirt in that spot so that not as much as a blade of grass had grown there ever since. Nothing was written on the ground. Nor was it written on any page. But the blankness itself might tell the story to anyone who had eyes to see. (325)

This Australian Gothic that 'continues to shadow Australian cultural production' (Gelder 122) most often refers to the suppressed history of settler violence. In the case of Piper's novel, however, the shadow is that of the hidden histories of both Japan and Australia during World War II. Jacqui Lo has pointed out that the trope of haunting has been deployed by a number of Australian critics (such as Ken Gelder and Jane M. Jacobs (Gelder and Jacobs)) 'to bring an awareness of history to the present, and to address concerns about ethics and justice in relation to the silenced and the hidden in Australian literature' (Lo 347). Gelder and Jacobs deploy this trope beyond literary works, applying it to the very process of reconciliation itself: 'Reconciliation is a policy which intends to bring the nation into contact with the ghosts of its past' (30). For Avery Gordon (Gordon), haunting is more than simply a Gothic phenomenon that triggers uneasiness and a sense of settler unbelonging. For, while haunting 'always registers the harm inflicted or the loss sustained by a social violence done in the past or in the present' (xvi), it is, she suggests, also 'distinctive for producing something-to-be-done' (xvi) by means of its affective engagement that may lead to a 'transformative recognition' (8). In other words, it may, by uncovering past wrongs, lead to some form of acknowledgement. In this sense, haunting and the notion of 'reconciliation as process' may be seen as complementary.

While Australia's conflicted history of relations with its Indigenous peoples—that is, the main political focus of our national government's Apology to Australia's Indigenous peoples (2008)—is not mentioned in Christine Piper's novel, the book does deal with two issues of historical responsibility that have been long suppressed and for which no apology, official or otherwise, has been

offered.⁵ The first is a particularly grim moment in the officially-unacknowledged history of Japan related to germ warfare; the second, the almost-forgotten internment in Australia of Japanese, Japanese-Australians and so-called 'haafus' ('half-caste' Japanese-Australians) during the Second World War. The dead trees in the image I quoted earlier are a redolent image whose significance is only revealed as Piper's narrative progresses: the novel revisits the secret history of Unit 731, a branch of the Army Medical College that developed biological weapons during World War II and tested them on living humans, 'starting in 1932 in the Japanese colony of Manchuria, and later in Guangzhou, Beijing, and Singapore' (Piper, 'Unearthing'). Disguising the unit as a timber-yard, the medical scientists referred to the subjects of their experiments as 'logs' (*maruta*) in a bizarre and dehumanising 'joke'. These subjects included infants, the elderly and pregnant women, many of whom were subjected to vivisection without anaesthetic to check the spread of diseases they had been infected with, including bubonic plague, anthrax, cholera, typhus, smallpox, botulism, and poison gas.

While in the novel Dr Ibaraki is not represented as a direct member of the Manchurian Unit 731, he is shown to have been involved in related germ warfare medical experiments in the Tokyo laboratory to which he is assigned. We discover during the course of the text that this, along with his marriage breakdown, is the source of Dr Ibaraki's suppressed memory and the aspect of his past that continues to haunt him. Ibaraki's guilt is somewhat contradictory, however, as he is both ashamed of his involvement in germ warfare and ashamed of his failure to properly perform his duty to his military superiors. So, the image of the 'dead trees ... their limbs stretching skywards, as if begging for forgiveness' (*After Darkness* 3)—while describing the immediacy of the Australian landscape—has resonance in the novel for the histories of both Australia and Japan. Moreover, the ideas of guilt and forgiveness are represented as complex and conflicted, involving personal as well as national histories.

An important aspect of these hidden histories in both Japan and Australia is the element of silence and silencing. Japan, for example, has been accused of a wilful

⁵ In an article in *The Conversation*, 'German experience in Australia during WW1 damaged road to 'multiculturalism,' Prof. Gerhard Fischer writes of the little-known apology that was delivered on September 26, 1999 by Governor-General Sir William Deane to members of the German-Australian community. He said:

The tragic, and often shameful, discrimination against Australians of German origin fostered during the world wars had many consequences. No doubt, some of you carry the emotional scars of injustice during those times as part of your backgrounds or family histories. Let me as Governor-General say to all who do how profoundly sorry I am that such things happened in our country. (Fischer n.p.)

forgetting, or 'historical amnesia', of its wartime atrocities. Like the competing sides of the Australian history wars, the Japanese nation has been divided about the 'sins of the nation' (to use Danielle Celermajer's term). Like Dr Ibaraki's divided emotions about his guilt at involvement at the laboratory and his shame at failing his superiors, Japan itself has what Piper has termed 'contradictory contrition', that is, 'remorse for its wartime aggression and victimization, and also shame at having lost the war' (Piper, Interview). This divided national attitude towards war memories is described by the term 'memory rifts', that is, the rift between those Japanese who 'see apology and atonement for the past as the best way to restore self-respect and international trust' and those 'who see a positive version of history and commemoration of the sacrifice of the war generation as the best way to achieve national pride' (Seaton, cited in Piper, 'Unearthing' 39).

Piper has suggested that this conflicted Japanese war memory is *personified* in Dr Ibaraki, whose

psychological struggle with his conscience, his sense of duty and his memories about his time at the laboratory in Tokyo echoes Japan's wider struggle to reconcile its three wartime identities of atomic bomb victim, protector of Asia and cruel aggressor. (Piper, Interview)

In Piper's novel, this dilemma is enacted through its protagonist's ambition and the enforced silence imposed on him when he takes on a medical research position at the laboratory. Initially, he is involved in research to develop synthetic forms of germs, but, as time goes on, the researchers are required to work with human subjects being infected by bacteria. The need for 'discretion' is impressed upon him by his superiors (indeed, he is ordered to 'take the secret [of the laboratory] to your grave' (211)), and when Dr Ibaraki finds out about the nature of the experiments he is involved in, he attempts to cleanse himself of the moral as much as the physical contamination. Finding himself physically and psychologically unable to perform an autopsy on an infant's body in front of an audience of important officials—as it is just after his wife has miscarried their own baby—he is dismissed for insubordination. His being sworn to secrecy prevents him from discussing his own moral qualms and his sense of disgust and disillusion with his wife, thus alienating him from her in Japan, and later from others who try to befriend him in Australia, such as the medical orderly at the Broome hospital, Sister Bernice. Ultimately, Dr Ibaraki realises that this silence has inhibited his ability to connect with others and to experience intimacy: 'In keeping my silence, I hadn't exercised the very quality that makes us human: our capacity to understand each other' (150). By expressing his guilt and exposing his shame, Dr Ibaraki is able to connect with others, something he has not been able to do previously. The narrative itself encapsulates this as Dr Ibaraki's

unexplained and sometimes puzzling actions and reactions start to make more sense as he begins to express his feelings.

Just as the character of Dr Ibaraki personifies the idea of conflicted Japanese war memories, so too does the narrative reveal the gap between his actions and his inner feelings. This gap is referred to as the 'empty centre' at the core of Japanese mind and culture, and as the 'reason for the perceived Japanese moral ambiguity towards their wartime past' (Piper, 'Unearthing' 38). Coined by sociologist Takeshi Ishida, this term contrasts inner feeling and hidden layers of self with visible external appearances, and, as cited by Piper, can lead to avoidance rather than reconciliation with the difficulties of the past so that, as 'the empty centre filters out the unpleasant engagements with one's own sins, difficult memories make the past unusable' (quoted in Piper, 'Unearthing' 38). In other words, there is social and institutional pressure to keep silent.

Yet, as Piper shows in her novel, this suppression of guilt and complicity results in stunted relations and personal suffering. It results, too, in Dr Ibaraki's sense of contamination, so that, on returning home from the laboratory, he tries not to think about what he has seen and focuses on 'washing [himself] clean' (177). It is significant, too, that at the end of her novel, having lost his wife without ever being able to confess to her what was causing him such anguish and disassociation, Dr Ibaraki writes a letter to the editor, in which he discloses his knowledge of the so-called Epidemic Prevention Laboratory. The image of the page on which he writes is itself meaningful:

I reach for my writing pad and turn to a new page. The paper, at first glance crisp and white, on closer inspection bears the indentations of my pen pressing onto the page before it—ghostly lines, the almost imperceptible grooves of the past. (294)

This palimpsestic image reinforces the pressure of the past on the present, and the impossibility of moral avoidance. While acknowledging the short-term shame this will bring on his family, Dr Ibaraki hopes that 'in time, it will be worth the shame' (94) for, in the words of his letter, 'there is something the Japanese people should know' (295). This knowledge to which Dr Ibaraki refers, and in which he was implicated during his time working at the laboratory, is based on a real-life unearthing of the past in July 1989. In what has come to be known as the Shinjuku Bones Affair, human remains were excavated in Tokyo's Shinjuku district by construction workers building a new National Institute for Health on the site of the old Army Medical College and adjacent to the Anti-Epidemic Laboratory, the institution responsible for Unit 731, also known as the Ishii Unit, named after its Director, Ishii Shirō. History Professor Keiichi Tsuneishi of Kanagawa University has shown that germ warfare

experimentation on non-Japanese people went far beyond the involvement of the Japanese army. He writes:

What is striking in my own recent research is that famous civilian physicians and professors of medicine actively sought data from the experiments, studied human tissue shipped back from overseas, and wrote up their conclusions for the army. Japan's medical community still won't admit this, but my research leaves no question. (quoted in Woodruff n.p.)

The official response to the bones was an order that they be disposed of immediately. It was only action by local people to resist this attempted wiping out of the past that enabled the bones to be preserved and the people to continue to demand the truth about their history. Today, the bones are stored inside a special monument on the site of the former Army Medical College in Tokyo. The Shinjuku bones are therefore a key example of Japan's continued suppression of its wartime past and Dr Ibaraki's revelation of his involvement in this shameful chapter of Japanese history, despite the pressure to remain silent, is of particular significance. Like the Shinjuku bones, the ghosts of the past keep returning in the form of traumatic memory until they are revealed and acknowledged. By dealing with 'perpetrator trauma', Piper shows, through the character of Dr Ibaraki, how perpetrators may also be victims, challenging the assumed binary between the categories of perpetrator and victim.⁶ In this case, Dr Ibaraki is drawn into this act (that he has come to deeply regret) by his own cultural conditioning.

Another poignant metaphor of the pressure of the past that Piper uses in the novel is that of the wooden tag from around the neck of a specimen of a baby that Dr Ibaraki smuggles out of the laboratory. This tag remains with him during his exile from Japan, hidden (appropriately) in his copy of *Robinson Crusoe*. When he lends his copy of the book to Sister Bernice while he is stationed at the hospital in Broome, she is curious about the tag she unwittingly finds therein, 'marked with the character *ko*, meaning "child"' (159). Dr Ibaraki reacts angrily to her query about its meaning, telling her that she 'should never have found it'. Like the 'ghostly lines of the past' on the writing pad, the knot at the end of the tag 'had left an impression on the page behind it: a small indentation, like a scar' (159). This almost imperceptible groove marks the ongoing pressure of past

⁶ See Tsutsui. See also Whitney Humanities Center, in which a definition is offered for perpetrator trauma and its cultural legacies, and the following questions are posed: 'What is the relationship between the perpetration of violence and the witnessing and/or suffering of violence? What distinguishes perpetrators who suffer moral injury from colleagues who do not? Is it possible to disentangle the effects of violence suffered, witnessed, and wielded by someone who becomes a perpetrator?' All of these questions are relevant for a reading of Piper's novel.

trauma that Dr Ibaraki has carried around with him ever since, and that he has tried to keep hidden.

But this is not the only suppressed history with which the novel engages. The Australian internment of German, Italians and Japanese nationals during World War II is not widely discussed in contemporary Australia nor is it a prominent feature of our nation's war memories. Like Australia, the United States and Canada interned their civilian 'enemy aliens' after the bombing of Pearl Harbour, a 'dirty little secret' from the past, as one commentator has described this period of American history (Wokusch). In similar fashion, particularly after the Japanese bombing of Darwin, Australian authorities established civilian internment camps for three reasons, according to the National Archives of Australia: 'to prevent residents from assisting Australia's enemies, to appease public opinion and to house overseas internees sent to Australia for the duration of the war' (National Archives of Australia). Not just Japanese, but Germans and Italians were interned, including those of these nationalities who were born in Australia. At its height in 1942, when Piper's novel is set, more than 12,000 civilians were interned in what were purpose-built camps at Tatura in Victoria, Hay and Cowra in New South Wales, Harvey in Western Australia, and Loveday in South Australia. To complicate the mix of internee-camp population, enemy prisoners of war were also sent to these internees' camps from 1943. Legislation introduced in 1939 in the form of the National Security (Aliens Control) Regulations applied the designation of 'enemy alien' initially to Germans or Australians born in Germany, some of whom were interned, and all of whom had restrictions imposed on their travel. Between 1940 and 1941, Italians and Japanese Australians became enemy aliens and risked internment. After the war, there was mass repatriation of internees to Japan, even those who had been living in Australia for most of their lives and had no knowledge of the Japanese language. Exceptions included Australian-born Japanese, those married to Australians or British citizens and those certified unfit to travel (Nagata 193-4).

Particularly problematic was the internment of the so-called 'haafus', or 'half-castes'. In Piper's novel, the character Johnny Chang, for example, is described as having 'moved among the Japanese, Chinese, native and even white population with ease' (17) in a multicultural Broome before the war, with his mixed Chinese and Japanese parentage and Australian citizenship. In Loveday Internment Camp, however, he is caught between the roles of friend and foe: both despised as a 'Chinaman' by the Japanese internees and regarded as 'an embarrassment to our compound' who 'thinks he's better than everyone else' and who has 'no respect for authority—no respect for our [Japanese] ways' (18); and categorised by the authorities as 'half-caste', half Japanese, and therefore necessitating being locked up. He himself refers to the group of 'haafus' as 'us Aussies' (4) and of himself as 'Australian born and bred' (71), an identity he is clearly denied by the

authorities. Caught in a similarly untenable situation is the character Stanley Suzuki whose Australian girlfriend believes him to be fighting the Japanese rather than locked up as a Japanese internee. He has served in the AIF (Australian Imperial Force) as a volunteer before being 'kicked out', in his words, 'because I'm Japanese, even though I've lived here since I was six months old' (76). His suicide attempt underlines the conflicted identity that has been foisted upon him by the nationalist ideologies of the war, when the ambiguity of 'both/and' is not an acceptable formulation of identity. The certainties of being classified as *either* friend *or* foe must be clearly differentiated under these political conditions.

So, this simplistic designation of 'enemy alien' was itself deeply problematic. Of the 4,300 Japanese civilians interned in Australia, only a quarter had been living in Australia when war broke out with Japan; others were sent from Allied-controlled countries such as the Dutch East Indies and French New Caledonia. These included Formosans and Koreans, who'd been interned as 'Japanese'. Thus, the entire notion of national identity is brought into question in the novel. By showing the effects on individual internees of the lack of a common language as well as any shared political outlook, Piper demonstrates conflict among the internees, all of whom have been lumped together as 'enemy aliens', including those, like her character Stanley Suzuki, who regarded themselves as proudly Australian and who had little in common with the nationalist outlook and loyalty to the Emperor promoted by the Japanese leaders in the camps. Stanley's depression and inability to cope with this conflicted identity is exacerbated by the way these 'haafus' and Formosans were subjected to bullying in the camps as they refuse to 'kiss their [the Japanese leaders'] arse, worship their god, bow to their emperor' (41). Similarly, the novel demonstrates the differing political agendas of those grouped together in the camp. When news emerges that the Japanese have attacked Broome, for example, the Japanese nationalists, such as Yamada, who are the leaders in the camp, are in celebratory mode, predicting an imminent victory over 'these Australian fools with their fat bellies and their rusty guns' who 'could soon be our prisoners ... begging us for mercy' (43-4). Neither Ibaraki nor, of course, the haafus, feel able to join in this premature and misjudged celebration of anti-Australian Japanese nationalism.

It is clear that Piper, who was born in South Korea to a Japanese mother and an Australian father, and who thus has a personal stake in both these national histories, is interested in establishing empathy with these hybrid characters' struggle with identity and belonging (Piper, 'After Darkness'). More broadly, however, she has suggested that her novel has contemporary relevance not just as a reminder of the past but as providing a parallel to contemporary cultures of fear. As she stated in an interview, she sees present-day refugees as subject to the same fear of 'the other' as the enemy aliens of World War II: 'Today's

refugees are viewed with the same suspicion and are victims of the same public hysteria that the Japanese civilians living in Australia once experienced' (Piper, Interview). Present-day issues can both focus attention on comparable past events and can make past events seem more relevant to the present.

Part of the ongoing relevance of this unearthing of wartime memories is the inherent racism and fear of otherness that provide the socio-political contexts in which these events occurred. Piper establishes this context very early in the novel, as the narrator encounters anti-Japanese sentiment at close quarters:

We pulled into a train station, stopping with a jolt at the platform. 'Murray Bridge', the sign read. A woman and small girl were sitting on a bench on the platform facing our carriage. The girl was about three—my niece's age when I'd last seen her—fair-skinned and chubby, with brown curls pulled into bunches on either side of her head. Seeing us, her eyes flashed. She tugged her mother's arm and pointed at us. The woman stared straight ahead. We were at the station less than a minute when the whistle blew. As the train lurched forward, the woman grabbed her daughter's hand and dragged her towards our carriage. She came so close I could see a mole above her lip. She spat. A glob landed on the window in front of my face.

'Bloody Japs!' she said, shaking her fist.

The train groaned as it moved away. The woman became smaller till she was no more than a pale slip, but I could still see her face. Eyes narrowed, mouth tight—her features twisted with hate. (3)

This passage physicalises the fear and paranoia that had led directly to the institution of internment camps for enemy aliens. The child's 'fair skin' establishes her whiteness and the description of her flashing eyes underlines how even a small child has internalised the fear of otherness and racial difference symbolised by the Japanese passengers. The 'glob of spit' expelled by her mother and the verbal and gestural hatred she displays are merely narrated by Dr Ibaraki without further comment, perhaps indicating the ordinariness and frequency of such encounters. There is an interesting parallel between this narration and that of Frantz Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), where a young French girl is terrified of his blackness, sheltering behind her mother, an encounter that causes him to muse on the psychological internalisation of racial inferiority that can accompany such responses. Piper's fictionalised encounter is itself based on the discourses of racism of the time (perhaps rendered understandable under the circumstances of perceived and actual invasion from the 'yellow peril'). Thus, despite a long history of Japanese presence in Australia

dating back to the late nineteenth century when small pearling communities settled in towns such as Broome and Darwin, and in the sugar-growing region of northern Queensland, a poster from the time declares that 'the Japanese who came to spy out our land, now attempt to return and enslave it'. Characterising all Japanese in Australia as 'every one a spy, every one a killer', the poster declaims that 'We've always despised them—now we must *smash* them!' (Bevege n.p.). It is perhaps not surprising that the Australian child and her mother represented in the novel have been influenced by the rhetoric of hate, such as this, that was circulating in the media of the time. Part of the irony of this encounter, of course, is that Dr Ibaraki is unable to respond as an individual but is trapped in the totalising discourse of racism.

This entrapment in racist stereotypes and anti-Japanese feeling bookends the novel, appearing again as Dr Ibaraki is being deported back to Japan towards the end of the war. Disembarking from the train at Port Melbourne and about to board a ship, the ex-internees encounter some aggressive locals:

I was struck by the paradox: although I'd been released from the camp, I'd never felt my enemy status so keenly till now. Ahead of us, a small group of onlookers was gathered at the top of the stairs ... a handful of children among them. But as we neared, their mouths set hard. We were nearly on the gangway when one of the men shouted, 'You should kill them!' 'Yeah, shoot the bastards!' a woman cried. My chest felt tight. I thought back to the train journey to Loveday, when I'd seen the woman with the little girl on the platform—the expression on her face. (275)

Despite the hurtful reception he once again encounters, Piper's text implies that Dr Ibaraki's experiences in Australia have not been completely negative. As the ship returning him to Japan nears his homeland, Ibaraki is described as feeling calm and optimistic: 'I would regrow from the embers of my former life, like a mallee tree destroyed by bushfire. I would make myself anew' (281). His use of the image of the mallee tree demonstrates his now-familiarity with the Australian landscape and his incorporation of the experience into the opportunity to 'start afresh' (281) in Japan acknowledges this new-found knowledge.

Ibaraki's desire to write a new chapter in his life is shown to be predicated on the need for him to properly acknowledge his past history. His memory and conscience are stirred by his being shown a newspaper article in Tokyo toward the end of the novel. The report details the discovery of the Shinjuku bones, and the newspaper's comment that the bones are 'not suspicious' and that no criminal investigation will take place, causes unresolved memories to 'disturb' Dr

Ibaraki's subconscious, 'like the beating wings of a dove' (288). The 'long-buried memory' of his own implication in the germ warfare program, like the bones, is unearthed, having lain 'like a shroud across the surface, the edges drawn tight' (291) as he had actively sought to distance himself from his past. His sense of his own complicity in an unresolved injustice leads him to write a letter to the editor, revealing the work of the so-called Epidemic Prevention Laboratory at Tokyo's Army Medical College in the 1930s. That this scene takes place during the celebration of the Summer Festival that includes a 'purification ceremony at the local shrine' (289) underlines the irony of Dr Ibaraki's personal attempt to set things right and decontaminate himself in contrast to the Japanese nation's denial, epitomised in the newspaper article's refusal of responsibility. Thus, the novel ends with an act of retrospective revelation, perhaps even apology, by someone implicated in events that have been and still are largely unacknowledged. This fictional act of reconciliation with his own personal past is, of course, in marked contrast to the real-life lack of recognition on the part of Japan and Australia.

But can excavating the past in this way in a work of fiction perform a corrective function? Piper's assertion that a novel may 'aid reconciliation efforts by stirring interest at the grassroots' (Piper, Interview), provides, I think, valuable insight into her own writerly motivation. By attracting interest, by informing and even inspiring readers, a novel (or indeed any other cultural text) can, she suggests, produce change by 'forming a groundswell that ultimately forces governments to recognise the victims of war' (Piper, Interview). It is in this sense that Piper's novel may be said to effect Avery Gordon's notion of 'transformative recognition' (8).

The process of 'unearthing' the past, by refusing both silencing and forgetting, is potentially ongoing, for, to quote Morris-Suzuki again:

... the rewriting of history never ends, since the constantly changing vantage point of the present reveals constantly changing landscapes of the past. (13)

By adding to the plurality of national memory and by incorporating aspects of 'unfinished business' that have not yet been included in the official remembrances of either Japan or Australia, Piper's novel functions as a way of drawing attention to these ghosts from the past that insist on being seen.

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