



# The Australian Journal of **INDIGENOUS EDUCATION**

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bodily, lived experience ... it is also a spirituality that references, in part, the mystical world of the indigenous culture" (p. 54).

One of the weaker chapters in the volume is the editor's own piece on Ealing film scores of the 1940s and 1950s. For one, given the large amount of contextualisation throughout the volume (extremely biographical in some chapters, including this one), it is surprising not to have Ealing studios discussed more generally for those who may not be familiar with them. Listing credits and plot synopses does not really suffice. More concerning is the lack of reference to the large, pre-existing body of work on film music. Like the topic of the piece, it is as though Richards writes about film music from afar, without participating in the (now quite historical) community it emanates from. Furthermore, the valuable work of those who have written about music within the Ealing films, would have enhanced, and indeed problematised, the work no end. The book is stronger on its coverage of Australian composers – and has a useful discussion on composer Clive Douglas and his relation to the Jindyworobak Manifesto, for instance – and will be useful for conservatorium libraries and for art music aficionados on these counts.

The volume is generously strewn with tables and pictures (including eight colour plates). While, for these reviewers at least, not all the pictures enhanced the textual material (for example, the landscape picture on p. 123), the authors and publishers are to be commended for such a detailed investment in the subject area.

In her chapter Macarthur notes that her work is "necessarily incomplete" (p. 74), in the sense that readings remain partial and open to interpretation. Many others in the volume could also make this confession. But this is a positive feature of the volume; there is much that jumps out of the chapters enticing the reader to further reflection or deeper study. Is, for example, feminine spirituality something discernible? Can one sonically depict the essence of Australian landscapes from afar? Is "lived experience" crucial to a notion of place? Would transplanted musical cultures have survived whatever the location they found themselves in?

This ultimately is a volume about place, and the musical sensibilities used by some groups to construct, re-imagine, celebrate, honour and remember place. This is an important focus. Interpreted more broadly, it allows us to begin to explore our relationship to the transcendent, to the mystic, to history, to our gender, and to our own personal inclinations. This is an important enterprise and in that this book assists it, it merits attention. A more purposeful consideration of context and scope could have made this volume essential reading on the topic, as it is, it tantalises as much as it delivers.

## TERRA NULLIUS: A JOURNEY THROUGH NO ONE'S LAND

Sven Lindqvist (S. Death, Trans.)

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Reviewing this book has been a challenge to ensure that Lindqvist is analysed in a just manner. As this is a complex text two reviewers from differing standpoints (the Indigenous social scientist and the non-Indigenous historian of travel and tourism) have combined to ensure the reader achieves a well-rounded opinion.

Sven Lindqvist is an accomplished Swedish author with a doctorate in the history of literature from Stockholm University. May we suggest interested readers visit [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sven\\_Lindqvist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sven_Lindqvist) to obtain an additional opinion of what appears to be a set writing style: a tried and proven formula of seductive, free flowing and highly provocative postcolonial travel writing which is applied *again* in the same smooth literary style as applied to previous publications. This book has been published in several languages, appealing to a predominantly European rather than an Australian audience. It combines a narrative of Lindqvist's alleged personal journey of 7,000 miles around the western half of the continent and then into its desert heart with local histories of place, philosophical musings and dreams, theories of race and human origins, polemical argument and autobiographical streams of consciousness to explicitly engage in the Australian history wars and locate them within a global movement of postcolonial reckoning. We say "alleged" because Lindqvist paints a very different picture to that promoted by the tourism industry, whose glossy marketing images often reinforce colonial myths produced by generations of political elites and the historians they have enfranchised. In doing so however, Lindqvist often replaces one form of stereotype with another and makes the reviewers question whether the author has really visited some locations and witnessed the complexities of contemporary outback life. See for example the negative descriptions of Coober Pedy (pp. 20-21), Fitzroy Crossing (p. 90), Tennant Creek (pp. 56-58) or Laverton (p. 145). On one hand, these do little to support the idealistic image of a noble pioneering nation founded on a history of European discovery and peaceful settlement. On the other, they simply replace the stereotypical Aboriginal drunk with the crude, alcoholic white settler: "... the whole town

smells of stale booze" (p. 21); "rowdy inebriated voices from the hotel's all white bar ... most well and truly drunk" (p. 90); "only three in the afternoon is full of rowdy, quarrelsome, drunken men with hats grafted to their heads" (p. 145). The creation of vivid, yet simplistic word pictures is but one narrative device used by Lindqvist to provide lighter relief to a text that is largely concerned with a darker project of exposing ideological and physical frontier violence – past and present – and drawing historical links between it and concepts of *terra nullius* to highlight the reality of the former and the absurdity of the latter.

By means of travel narrative and revisionist history, Lindqvist thus invokes, deconstructs and refutes his literary inspired childhood impressions of the Australian outback and Aboriginal people within what is arguably a "tragedy" or "dark tourism" guidebook. Presenting the text itself as a mixture of travel and history writing Lindqvist reveals successive "ploys" used by settler Australians to stake claims to a so-called "No One's Land" and legitimate the dispossession of Aboriginal people. While its lyrical prose is peppered with inaccuracy, simplification and sweeping generalisation, it relaxes the reader into subject matter that normally is not palatable and in doing so Lindqvist implants shards of historical comment into the reader's senses similar to a sliver of glass as he talks of rape, murder and atrocities against Indigenous Australians, yet you read on. The narrative builds on these small cutting fragments that Lindqvist has woven into the dialogue between romantic childhood memories and historically informed traveller analysis to comment on the lack of memorials on the landscape that act as signposts to the past.

In Chapter one Lindqvist recounts visiting a "massacre" site where an Aboriginal clan reportedly become "extinct" and expresses concern that such stories remain unmarked in the landscape and untold in Australian museums (Chapter 1 and pp. 98-101). The author thus engages in debates about the legitimacy of British occupation and the refusal by settler Australians to confront their history, and also ponders the tendency amongst Australians to litter their continent with memorials to ANZACS who fought overseas wars and organise tourist trails around places of Aboriginal incarceration and internment. Interweaving philosophical musings, scientific theories by Freud and Durkheim, and travel narrative, Lindqvist speculates as to why generations of Australians have seen it necessary to fabricate the myth of the peaceful settlement of an empty land. Various sites along his journey provide a point of departure for discussions about this cult of denial or forgetfulness and its relation to convict origins and a projection of a history of European invasion and theft onto the native Other through the creation of the stereotype of Aboriginal criminality. Through these interweaving layers of thought, Lindqvist lubricates the reader's cognitive and

emotive response in much the same way that Pavlov did his dog. He creates a desire for more. The shards of glass or cutting facts thus link and build onto the reader's subconscious.

Lindqvist structures his traveller's tale into seven chapters. Each works to simultaneously advance his own travel narrative, locate his personal experiences and childhood impressions in contemporary time and place, and explore a dominant historical theme. Through the skilful plotting onto the landscape of his contemporary travel route and experiences, selected revisionist and fabricated histories, and the various terms by which successive generations of settler Australians had either asserted that Australia was a "*terra nullius*" or worked to ensure that it would become. Lindqvist arguably sets out to create a sort of "whitefella songline" that incorporates the collective dreams and exploits of all settler Australians. This co-joined the primal ancestors who emigrated from Europe and native born Australians in a single colonial project that sought to substantiate or attain *terra nullius* through either massacre (see Chapter 1: To Moorundie); the improvement of an "empty" continent by development and/or advance of civilisation (The Secret of the Desert); the Stolen Generations and breeding out of blackness (To Kahlin Compound); forced removal and genetic experimentation (The Dead Do Not Lie); social intervention and assimilation (To Pinjarra); atomic radiation (The Smell of White Man); or finally, the appropriation and loss of culture in art (The Ground). This works to implicitly contest the idea put forward by some participants in the Australian history wars that the past is somehow a foreign country, as well as suggest there is a need for collective responsibility for past deeds. This call to action is a recurring motif throughout the text.

Lindqvist defines "*terra nullius*" as something like; land that belongs to no-one or no-one who counts. This could be interpreted as someone who is inferior to Europeans, someone who does not for example farm or work the soil in recognisable ways. He is deliberately ambivalent, but this arguably is suggestive of the labour definition of land ownership. Perhaps Lindqvist from his non-Indigenous European standpoint considers he does not need to be more precise to achieve his purpose. As Lindqvist has not set out to produce an academic text, he is arguably seeking to act as a bridge between academics who until recently were the predominant writers of Aboriginal history and wider publics who either seek to deny their past, or are ignorant about it. He is arguably trying to make it palatable, faceable, and comprehensible to greater numbers of European peoples.

Lindqvist's grasp on Australian history is however sometimes less than adequate and prone to sweeping generalisation. To the untrained eye one covers up the other. The subsequent comments are directed at only a few of the more obvious errors. Refer page 6, "... we

have acacia and eucalyptus full stop ... there are only two trees here". This is obviously incorrect as there are in fact some 258 native plant species in Australia (CSIRO, 2007). Note the quote on the bottom of page 4 and top of page 5; this is imprecise literary practice from an author who should know better. There is no footnote/author for this quotation. While it may be acceptable for a travel text to have personal insights such a polemic approach to history writing does require supporting evidence. There are many more examples of similar unsubstantiated empathy seeking quotes (see top of p. 8). Melbourne was a penal colony (p. 7); incorrect. The Aboriginal reserves were in fact gazetted in the 1920's, not the 1930's as stated by Lindqvist (p. 16). The overuse of the terms "black" and "white" is also perturbing, a polemic tool. It reinforces and sometimes creates barriers at the expense of those who he is writing about.

While the text has been categorised as a history book in popular travel in reality it regularly lapses into a traveller's tale peppered with historical inaccuracy. Imprecise references to partners in ethnology, Spencer and Gillen abound throughout the text. Refer to page 40, "... they [the Aboriginal men] chose Frank Gillen. Gillen, in turn chose Baldwin Spencer". The truth is Edward Stirling chose Gillen, why; because Gillen was familiar with the local environment and the local language. It was on the Horn expedition in the 1890's that the city-based evolutionary biologist, Spencer met the inland telegraph station master, Gillen after Edward Stirling engaged the latter Gillen (Mulvaney et al., 2000, pp. 8-9). It was from this association that Spencer collaborated with Gillen to produce the publication *The Native Tribes of Central Australia* (Spencer & Gillen, 1899). Lindqvist would have us believe there was some form of collaboration between Aboriginal men seeking an international audience and Gillen: "together the two partners [Spencer and Gillen] became the Arrernte people's way out to the world". The reader is led to believe that the Arrernte people manipulated Gillen and Spencer to their advantage to *get their message* on a world stage (p. 42). This is fanciful writing.

It is also important to understand Lindqvist's errors concerning totemic beliefs, land and recording of language. On page 40 for example, the author states that these two prominent ethnological "researchers didn't know the language". Incorrect, Spencer and Gillen's publication of 1899 included an extensive glossary of "Native Terms". Gillen was to some degree familiar with Aboriginal languages as he had lived at Alice Springs for some 20 years since 1875. Lindqvist would also have us believe linguist T. G. H. Strehlow was the first to transpose oral tradition into a written language (p. 167). Spencer and Gillen in fact pioneered this process in Central Australia 30 years previously. Lindqvist in his argument regarding "terra nullius" (p. 164) would also lead us to believe that Spencer and Gillen showed

no interest in Aboriginal relationships between the people and the land, once again incorrect, they in fact pioneered the understanding of totemic landscapes in Australia. Yet Lindqvist acknowledges on page 114 that Spencer and Gillen did study totem rites.

Other inaccuracies include the assertion that Strehlow was "a mounted policeman" (p. 165) for approximately 20 years. This is incorrect as he was never a policeman, mounted or otherwise. He was however appointed in 1936 as a Commonwealth public servant working for Aboriginal Affairs at Jay Creek for approximately six years. Prior and after this he was an academic in Adelaide. On page 182 Lindqvist also states that in 1956 Nancy Munn was the first person "to study the desert peoples' visual imagery in depth", incorrect for Charles Mountford – refer footnote 149 and the 1937 publication in the bibliography on page 240 – did in fact undertake work on the form and meaning of Aboriginal art. Mountford had undertaken considerable research into the art of "desert peoples" 19 years previous to Munn. In 1951 Mountford was drawing the totemic landscape at Yuendumu and in 1956 the same year as Munn he was on an expedition to Central Mount Wedge with a Warlpiri man, Gwoja Tjungurrayi drawing and interpreting totemic landscape. Lindqvist appears to overlook facts when it does not fit into his point of view.

The statement on page 166 is of particular concern:

... for a people without documents, history soon turns into fairy tale and dream. But the Geography remains. But you can go to the place where the past happened. Soon you don't know any more when it happened, only where it happened and where it goes on happening.

From the Indigenous standpoint it is not always where or when it happened, rather it is why it happened; neither is it a fairy tale or a dream! The concept of place is important for the totemic connection is with the land, with the space and shape; the belief is within every stone rock, tree or grain of sand. It would appear that Lindqvist has a somewhat superficial understanding of key Indigenous issues. This is amplified on the cover of the text where an image of an Indigenous Australian has been appropriated from Getty Images, a web-based image-bank. There is no mention of the identity of the Aboriginal man nor where or when it was taken. As this anonymous Aboriginal man is painted in red ochre, one must ask whether this photograph was taken around a ceremony? If the man featured has since passed away and if this image has been published without family approval, this text has knowingly violated decades of protocols established by Government and image-making bodies such as the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS), Film Australia



and others. The practice of buying a generic image, the impersonal practice of the author distancing himself from and appropriating subject matter for commercial or other purpose without interaction with the people concerned leaves us questioning if the author has actually interacted with an Indigenous Australian? On page 45 Lindqvist by his own pen states "... strict rules demand advance written permission to ... photograph an Aborigine or reproduce what an Aborigine says ... why should a long-exploited people be prepared to offer itself as an exotic, unpaid bait to the tourist traps?" The author has succumbed to the worst form of exploitation, image misappropriation which leaves the reader questioning the moral high ground that the author assumes throughout this text. Is there nobility in Lindqvist's revelation of the injustices done by settler society including the development of the myths associated with the conquest of the land, and the assertions of terra nullius or is the author no better than many of those he skilfully critiques? The irony is that in creating noble rhetoric (p. 45) Lindqvist denigrates on the cover of the text much that is sacred in Aboriginal protocol.

Inadequate scholarship, overgeneralisation and misleading content discounts this text from being included in an Australian library collection, unless it is classified as a traveller's tale. There was scope within this text for something memorable: a critique of the victor's portrayal of both a fickle landscape, its beauty raw and also gentle, and its history as terra nullius. Written in a style that is intoxicating, its seductive appeal maintains interest while shards of glass are introduced into the reader's subconscious to unsettle established beliefs ... but it is a copy of previous texts. Lindqvist simply chose another country, applied the same style, a different subject matter, is this not commercialism at the expense of Aboriginal people? Let the reader be aware!

## ■ References

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