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The Chief Protector returns : textual representations of A. O. Neville

Author

Rebecca Dorgelo

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Introduction:**An Anxious Repetition: A.O. Neville's Manifestations.**

As Geoffrey Bolton notes, "Australians are greatly influenced by bureaucracy, but bureaucrats are not Australian heroes" (13). Auber Octavius Neville's entry in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* illustrates this point, chronicling his rise through the ranks of the public service in Western Australia. The majority of the entry is devoted to his initiatives once he had attained the position of Chief Protector of Aborigines:

Born on 20 October 1875 at Ford, Northumberland, England. ... It was as chief protector of Aborigines [in Western Australia] that he came to the public eye. He shaped official policy towards Aborigines during much of the period from 1915 until his retirement in 1940. ... As chief protector (1915-36) and commissioner for native affairs (1936-40), his strategy was to extend the department's legal authority, particularly over people of part descent, his main interest. At his instigation, regulations were issued under the 1905 Aborigines Act, and the Act itself was amended, to give the department more power, particularly over children. ... The ostensible purpose was to bring about permanent segregation of Aborigines of full descent, who were believed to be near extinction; and temporary segregation and training of those of part descent who would re-enter society as domestics and farm-

workers, eventually blending with the white population through intermarriage. (5)

This brief biographical excerpt serves as an introduction to Neville, providing some measure of his status and position. It will be augmented throughout the project as the many representations of Neville are examined.

This project takes as its model Kay Schaffer's *In the Wake of First Contact: The Eliza Fraser Stories*. In that work Schaffer examines the many stories surrounding the figure of Eliza Fraser, a white woman who was shipwrecked off the north Queensland coast in 1836 and lived with the local Aboriginal population before her "rescue" and return to white society. The figures of Eliza Fraser and A.O. Neville are different in many ways. Fraser's 1836 encounter with the north Queensland Aborigines is constructed as "first contact" and is thus woven into an explicitly colonial narrative of nation, contact and exploration. A.O. Neville appears much later, an influential figure from 1915 until around 1947, and is a part of a different narrative of nation and progress. Yet, Fraser and Neville are similar to the degree that surrounding both their lives are a profusion of stories and representations, and both are mobilised in different ways and for changing purposes over time. As Schaffer states of Fraser: "What is known of the woman and the event, however, is less significant than the representations and the fantasies which this ... colonial episode set into circulation" (1). Although

historical records and documents from the period are examined in conjunction with literary and popular representations of both Fraser and Neville, the focus of such examinations is “not so much as an historical event but as foundational fiction aligned with the maintenance of a colonial empire and, later, with the makings and remakings of the Australian nation” (Schaffer 3). I argue that the remaking or reimagining of the nation serves as a trigger for the continuing iteration of the figure of Neville in contemporary literature.

The motivation behind this study of representations is, to borrow Schaffer’s phrase, “to [attempt to] understand how past constructions and understandings of difference impinge on the politics of the present” (19). This project transfers Schaffer’s methodology in examining Eliza Fraser through the stories that surround her to the study of A.O. Neville and his many incarnations in literary and popular texts. This study moves through a range of archival material including correspondence and departmental reports, to Neville’s work *Australia’s Coloured Minority: Its Place in the Community*, contemporary representations of Neville through newspaper articles, to the plethora of fictional representations of Neville.

I argue throughout this project that representations of Neville are mobilised in order to work through the tension inherent in settler societies, of being “both colonizer and colonized” (Bhabha “The Other Question” 108). This tension is expressed differently in each work

examined, however all centre around the representational dynamic between Neville and the Aboriginal characters crucial to each text. Neville has been a contested textual representation since his appearance in contemporary newspapers in the time of his role as Chief Protector of Aborigines (1915 to 1936) and later Commissioner for Native Affairs (1936-1940). Early instances of Neville's representation as a conflicted, ambivalent figure, which exhibits this dual tension, are most obvious with the publication of his own book in 1947, which elaborates his theories and aspirations for the Aboriginal population after his retirement from the Department of Native Affairs (formerly the Department of Aborigines and Fisheries). Neville's *Australia's Coloured Minority: Its Place in the Community*, despite its overt concerns with his theories and proposed policies for the future of native affairs, plays host to a large number of first-person stories, anecdotes and snippets of Neville's personal life, and is an important site of self-representation. Neville's monograph and his presence in contemporary newspaper articles are the formative textual representations of the figure of Neville, and the links between these texts and the fictional works chosen for analysis are examined throughout the thesis.

Bhabha articulates the concept of "the chain of stereotypical signification [which] is curiously mixed and split, polymorphous and perverse, an articulation of multiple belief" ("The Other Question" 118). He illustrates this concept with the following example: "[t]he black is

both savage (cannibal) and yet the most obedient and dignified of servants (the bearer of food); he is the embodiment of rampant sexuality and yet innocent as a child” (118). Bhabha’s notion of split, conflicting signification can be usefully applied to the ways in which the character of Neville is represented. The “curiously mixed and split” nature of the ways in which Neville is portrayed will become apparent throughout the project—he is simultaneously represented as cruel and benevolent, paternalistic and distantly bureaucratic. I argue that this split signification begins with Neville’s own work and continues throughout the literary and popular iterations of his character through to the present. Further, I posit that this split signification operates throughout all of the texts examined as a continually changing, evolving response to the dual coloniser / colonised tension endemic to settler societies.

Fictional representations of Neville begin in the early 1970s with Thomas Keneally’s *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* (1972), and continue in the 1980s with Jack Davis’ plays *Kullark* (1982) and *No Sugar* (1986). Representations of Neville become much more prevalent from the 1990s to the present, however. The biography *Mister Neville* by Pat Jacobs in 1990, Alice Nannup’s autobiography with Lauren Marsh and Stephen Kinnane *When the Pelican Laughed* in 1992 (reprinted in 1993, 1996 and 2000), Pamela Rajkowski’s biographical work *Linden Girl: A Story of Outlawed Lives* with an entire section devoted to Neville (1995), Doris

Pilkington's 1996 biographical novel *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence*, Kim Scott's (Miles Franklin Award-winning) novel *Benang: From the Heart* (1999), Philip McLaren's 2001 novel *Sweet Water... Stolen Land*, poetry by Geoff Page (2002), Christine Olsen's adaptation of Pilkington's *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence* into *Rabbit-Proof Fence: The Screenplay* in 2002, and the feature film directed by Phillip Noyce *Rabbit-Proof Fence* (also in 2002), and the autobiographical / biographical *Shadow Lines* by Stephen Kinnane (2003) are all textual instances in which Neville appears. The number of texts in which he is present highlights the significance of Neville as a figure worthy of investigation. The variety of the forms in which representations of Neville manifest further supports the argument that I advance throughout this project for the importance of these representations of Neville as a vehicle for constructions of (and anxieties about) postcolonial Australia.

There has been very little critical material published concerning A.O. Neville: instead, he is represented in the fictional works enumerated here. Apart from a growing amount of critical work surrounding *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence* and its film adaptation, the representation of Neville has rarely received attention, and what exists has been limited to determining the veracity of such representations. This project, while seeking to remedy this lack of scholarly work about Neville, operates under the awareness of the fact that there is much about this crucial colonial figure that could be examined, and for

reasons of scope limits its focus to a select number of highly charged textual representations.

This study is arranged chronologically, in relation to the texts which are its focus. The motives for this arrangement are ones of practicality and ease of argument. I wish to draw links between the many, very different, modes and instances in which Neville appears. Such an argument is best served by beginning with the earliest representations of Neville and working forward from that point of origin.

Throughout this project the variety of works and forms are analysed differently in relation to various strains of postcolonial theory. While there are enduring similarities between the works examined and the ways in which Neville is represented, the differences in form and context in particular require multiple (though connected) modes of analysis and appropriate theory. An example of the necessary differences in approach is found in relation to Scott's *Benang: From the Heart*. Scott's is the most overtly self-reflexive work examined in the course of this thesis, engaging explicitly with colonial texts and discourses, rewriting the archival material that is its intertext. *Benang* will therefore be dealt with in a different manner to Neville's *Australia's Coloured Minority: Its Place in the Community*, just as the archival material will be examined in a different way to the versions of *Rabbit-Proof Fence*, although all are viewed as equally potent expressions of

postcolonial Australia. Throughout the thesis I utilise the work of Bhabha, as, despite his focus on earlier colonial India, many of his arguments have particular resonance for my examination of Neville. However, Bhabha's somewhat abstract approach has limitations for this thesis, necessitating my use of Nicholas Thomas, who advocates a more fully contextualised approach. Thomas argues that "only localized theories and historically specific accounts can provide much insight into the varied articulations of colonizing and counter-colonial representations and practices" (ix).

Although it is the contemporary debate surrounding the film *Rabbit-Proof Fence* and its portrayal of Neville and Australia's past (which connect with current debate over the Stolen Generations in particular and the truth of frontier violence in general) that remains the most crucial motivation of this project (and which will be dealt with in the final chapter), I argue that it is worthwhile and illuminating to look to the beginning and place these debates in the context of the continual representation of Neville in literary and popular texts. The project begins, then, by examining Neville's self-representation and the ways in which he is constructed by his contemporaries. Chapter one engages most overtly with discourses of history, through its focus on archival material and Neville's own work, to highlight the manner in which Neville constructs himself and is constructed by others. Following Schaffer, this project emphasises the relativity of truth and the historical

endeavour—“[t]he approach assumes that there is no guarantee of knowledge beyond the textual representations of the event” (Schaffer 3)—and places archival material and fictional representation side by side. Linda Hutcheon usefully analyses the relationship between history and fiction as it will be considered throughout this project: “[t]o write history—or historical fiction—is equally to narrate, to reconstruct by means of selection and interpretation. History (like realist fiction) is *made* by its writer, even if events are made to seem to speak for themselves.” (“Historiographic Metafiction” 231-32). When working with an historical figure, it becomes vital to have an engagement with and an argument about discourses of truth and history. Bhabha states that:

In order to understand the productivity of colonial power it is crucial to construct its regime of truth. ... Only then does it become possible to understand the productive ambivalence of the object of colonial discourse—that “otherness” which is at once an object of desire and derision, an articulation of difference contained within the fantasy of origin and identity.

(96)

This project will endeavour to analyse and codify Neville’s regime of truth (as well as the ways in which this truth is represented in the fictional works examined) in order to further understand its impact on colonial and contemporary discourse. Ideas central to this regime of

truth include conceptions of race, nation, progress, administration, and identity.

Chapter two focuses on Kim Scott's *Benang: From the Heart*. Scott's work is a particularly complex, strategic example of fiction containing the figure of Neville. Scott's work received significant public acclaim, particularly evident in its receipt of the Miles Franklin Award in 2000. *Benang* is a multi-layered, self-reflexive work which explicitly engages with (and rewrites or reconstructs) the archival material surrounding Neville as well as his published monograph. Hutcheon's argument regarding historiographic metafiction is useful when examining all of the texts in which the figure of Neville returns, as the presence of Neville necessitates an engagement with history. However, it is particularly relevant to Scott's *Benang* which continually plays with both its fictional and historical status as well as the reader's expectations of the text and of history. As Hutcheon goes on to explain,

as Foucault and Jameson have repeatedly stressed ... history, while it had a real referent once upon a time, is only accessible to us in textualized form. Therefore the historiographic metafictionist who also deals with "events *already constituted*" but who self-consciously signals their textual nature within his [sic] novel is perhaps in an even more difficult position than the historian: he [sic] is constrained by the demands of narrative fiction as much as by those of history's events. ("Historiographic Metafiction" 232)

Although usefully highlighting the textual nature of history and the similarities between the work of the historian and the writer of historiographic metafiction, Hutcheon seems to simultaneously reinforce the value and quantifiable reality of history—the historian and metafictionalist alike can rely on the unproblematic truth of “history’s events.” Leaving these reservations aside, Hutcheon’s concept is a valuable one that informs this analysis of fictional representations of an historical figure. In light of *Benang*’s interaction with discourses of truth and history in relation to the archival material referred to and quoted throughout the novel, this chapter is linked to the first chapter’s concern with archival representation.

Chapter three turns around the representations of Neville that have circulated most widely in recent times, Doris Pilkington’s 1996 biographical novel *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence*, Christine Olsen’s adaptation of Pilkington’s work, *Rabbit-Proof Fence: The Screenplay* in 2002, and the feature film directed by Phillip Noyce (based on Olsen’s screenplay), *Rabbit-Proof Fence* (2002). I examine these representations of Neville as well as the increasingly heated debates that surround the film version (which focus particularly on the ways in which Neville is portrayed). The argument developed throughout the project about what it means for contemporary Australia that the figure of Neville continually returns (in increasingly prominent forms and works) and the anxieties performed in the debates about the representation of

Neville is fully articulated here. The iteration or return of the figure of Neville, when examined through Bhabha's articulation of colonial repetition, highlights an inherent preoccupation with Neville as a representation of the uncanny nature of Australia's colonial, administrative past: "[r]epeatability, in my terms, is always the repetition in the very act of enunciation, something other, a difference that is a little bit uncanny" (187). I argue that the continual return of the figure of Neville (in seemingly ever more public and popular texts) highlights an anxious tension between unpleasant historical realities and the present imagined version of the nation.

Running throughout this examination of these various textual representations of Neville is an argument about why it is that the figure of Neville continually appears (and has done for over two decades, with growing insistency from the 1990s to the present). Neville has achieved a peculiar status as a widely recognisable historical bureaucrat, and is considerably more prominent than other historical figures of similar influence and policies (J.W. Bleakley, Chief Protector of Aborigines in Queensland, and Cecil Cook, Chief Protector of Aborigines in the Northern Territory, for example). I argue that a reason for his continual iteration and ubiquity is that Neville can be

seen as a synecdoche¹ for all similar white bureaucratic figures. Neville as represented in literary and popular fiction appears to act as the one (or major) representative of oppressive colonial bureaucracy. Neville's return in the many literary and popular texts throughout the last two decades functions in a synecdochic manner, as a representation of the many bureaucratic agents of state-sanctioned cruelty and discrimination against the Indigenous population. Tony Hughes d'Aeth argues that the film *Rabbit-Proof Fence* is universalising in that it takes the story of one lot of stolen children as stand-ins for the entire Stolen Generations: "the film chooses one story to stand for all stories." However, it can also be seen to work the other way (in perhaps a more insidious fashion), where the story of one bureaucrat serves as the story of all white colonial oppressors, in effect diminishing the magnitude of white wrongs (and therefore the need for repentance and redress).

If Neville is taken as a synecdochic representation of Australia's bureaucratic past in relation to the treatment and attempted control of the Indigenous population, then it proves fruitful to examine his repetitious manifestations in so many texts as uncanny. Bhabha cites Freud's notion of "the *unheimlich* [which] is 'the name for everything that ought to have remained ... secret and hidden but has come to light'" (14-15). Bhabha also articulates Hannah Arendt's slightly

¹ J.A. Cuddon's *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* defines "synecdoche" as "A figure of speech in which the part stands for the whole, and thus something else is understood within the thing mentioned" (890).

different conception of the unhomely or uncanny as the “distinction between things that should be hidden and things that should be shown” (15), highlighting “the profound revelations and reinscriptions of the unhomely moment” (15). Here the iteration of the figure of Neville is both revelation and reinscription. Neville can be seen as *unheimlich* revelation—a bureaucratic, governmental figure from the past who continually returns to disrupt the present, articulating notions of state control, eugenics, and children stolen by a paternalist bureaucracy—bringing to light images that some that advocate the imagining of Australia as a just, fair, nation with a past that requires no apologies might prefer to remain hidden. The continual return of the figure of Neville in so many texts reinscribes this unhomely revelation.

Bhabha states that the uncanny or unhomely impacts on the public, political sphere as well as discomfiting personal notions of history: “[t]he unhomely moment relates the traumatic ambivalences of a personal, psychic history to the wider disjunctions of political existence” (“Introduction” 15). In this way the figure of Neville moves between the personal and the public, acting uncannily upon both the nation and the individual. The uncanny Neville is a single individual, highlighting a personalised relationship with history. Simultaneously, however, Neville also embodies a synecdochic representation of bureaucratic, “benevolent” white history and its consequences—relating personal history to the wider disjunctions of political existence.

The iteration of the figure of Neville highlights an inherent anxiety: “the repetition of the ‘same’ can in fact be its own displacement, can turn the authority of culture into its own non-sense precisely in its moment of enunciation” (Bhabha 195). Hence the representation of Neville can be seen as an emphatically destabilising force, ensuring that the realities of Australia’s postcolonial past have a presence in contemporary culture.

Chapter 1:

Bureaucratic Expressions: A.O. Neville, Chief Protector of Aborigines

This chapter examines Auber Octavius Neville's biographical and autobiographical construction in a variety of texts, in particular *Australia's Coloured Minority: Its Place in the Community*. This analysis extends to items from the government archives of Neville's bureaucracy, and newspaper articles written by Neville under the acronym "A.O.N." As well as analysing Neville's self-representation in these different texts, and the colonial projects with which he personally identifies, this chapter serves as an introduction to the following chapters that deal with fictional representations of Neville. Although the representations brought into focus here are classified as non-fiction and archival material, it is important to recall Linda Hutcheon's emphasis on the equally discursive nature of both history and fiction ("Historiographic Metafiction" 236).

The vast array of representations of (and by) Neville issuing from the period of his occupation of the position of Chief Protector of Aborigines / Commissioner of Native Affairs makes it impossible to discuss more than a small sample of the material here. I have selected two of the hundreds of newspaper articles either by or about Neville and a small number of the voluminous collection of archives from his administration for analysis. The representations that I examine are

either contemporary or proximate to Neville's time as Chief Protector. It is inevitable that any examination of the representation of Neville is inextricably linked to his role and work in the Department of Aborigines and Fisheries / Department of Native Affairs. *Australia's Coloured Minority* highlights this connection; although it is putatively concerned with the Indigenous population of Australia and Neville's plans for their future, it contains a plethora of biographical anecdotes and passages. Likewise this chapter moves between a focus on Neville and on the administrative projects that he attempts to carry out.

A.O. Neville in His Own Words: *Australia's Coloured Minority*.

Australia's Coloured Minority is a reasonably dry, if disturbing, work. It is not distinguished by a high quality of writing, and the majority of its pages deal with Neville's vision of a future Australia and its ideal Native Administration. Published seven years into his retirement, Neville's continued interest in his former work is clearly demonstrated. There are chapters titled "Assimilation," "Institutions," "Camps and Housing," "Education," "Youth, Work, Wages," and "National Control." These chapters deal with what Neville sees as the reality of the present situation in each of these areas and his detailed plans for a possible future. In "Institutions," for example, Neville advocates the segregation of "mixed-race" children for their training: "The child's whole life from infancy ... up to eighteen years or thereabouts, is to be

spent in this centre" (127). The writing is most energetic in Neville's anecdotes about his life and his experiences with the Indigenous population, however this tone does not extend to the majority of the work.

Nicholas Thomas argues that colonial projects are both powerful and fundamentally fractured and conflicting. I focus on Neville's particular colonial project as distinct from, although inevitably informed by, any overriding or concurrent projects at work in Western Australia between 1915 and 1940, a project that extends with less influence to 1947 when *Australia's Coloured Minority* was published. Thomas emphasises the instability of colonial projects and their discursive nature: "projects are of course often projected rather than realized" (106). This is, in part, a result of their multiplicity: "because of their confrontations with indigenous interests, alternate civilizing missions and their internal inconsistencies, colonial intentions are frequently deflected, or enacted farcically and incompletely" (Thomas 106). Thomas further highlights the attributes of a colonial project: "A project is neither a strictly discursive entity nor an exclusively practical one" (106). I use Thomas's conception of colonial projects to emphasise the inconstant, incoherent nature of Neville's administration and the ways in which he represents himself, although without losing sight of the damage that his policies caused. Whilst here Neville's discourse is under scrutiny, the lived experience of those subject to his

administrative experiments leaks through Neville's own writing. As such, it serves to remind us of the "violence committed through representation" (Morris 72).

The underlying anxieties regarding the legitimacy and authority of Neville's work and project are evident in the state-sanctioned authority claimed by Neville's monograph. The title page of *Australia's Coloured Minority* is set out in a way that emphasises Neville's status and makes claims for his authority. Gerard Genette argues for the importance of examining such textual satellites as the epigraph, dedication, title page and publisher's information; these "paratexts," he states, work to "ensure the text's presence in the world, its 'reception' and consumption" (1). Neville reminds readers of his lengthy career – "Formerly Commissioner of Native Affairs for Western Australia" – while the legitimating credentials of A.P. Elkin, the author of the introduction to Neville's work, are also on display. Elkin was arguably the highest authority on matters regarding Aboriginal Australia throughout the 1930s and 1940s, and therefore his support for *Australia's Coloured Minority* is particularly notable. Australia's first professional anthropologist, he became Professor of Anthropology in 1933 and was "virtually in control of anthropology in Australia" (Wise).

The central argument throughout Elkin's introduction is for the reduction of the prejudices of "Australians proper ... that is, our white selves" (11) against Aborigines and "half-castes" in order to further

assimilation, stating that, often, public opinion “lags behind official policy” in this regard (16). Elkin states unequivocally that “[i]t is because the author ... is fully seized with the necessity of the policy of assimilation that I gladly contribute this introduction” (18). This statement is then qualified with reference to his own published work, reinforcing his superior status through the comment: “I am, of course, pleased that it agrees in the main with what was suggested in my ‘Citizenship for the Aborigines,’ written at about the same time as Mr. Neville wrote this book, but published earlier (1944)” (18). Elkin makes clear his personal as well as scholarly relationship with Neville, expressing his “appreciation” for Neville’s financial and bureaucratic assistance “when [Elkin was] engaged in anthropological field work in Western Australia” (18-19). Elkin appears to be somewhat in Neville’s debt, perhaps accounting for the mixture of praise and condescension throughout the introduction: “[t]he head of the appropriate Department can do much to help scientists in their work, ‘making the wheels run smoothly’ and even lessening overhead expense. And Mr. Neville did this” (19). The title page of Neville’s work spells out Elkin’s many roles: “Professor of Anthropology, University of Sydney; President, Association for the Protection of Native Races; Vice-Chairman, Aborigines’ Welfare Board, New South Wales.” Genette highlights the implicit agenda of such paratextual manoeuvres—they are “at the service of a better reception for the text and a more pertinent reading of

it (more pertinent, of course, in the eyes of the author and his allies)”

(2). Elkin’s contribution can be read in two ways. That Australia’s pre-eminent anthropologist supported Neville’s project highlights the powerful and hegemonic status of Neville and his theories. However, Neville’s need for and crucial positioning of such approval reveals his anxiety and vulnerability.

Further examination of the paratexts surrounding Neville’s work shows the complex ways in which they operate. The dedication and epigraph that open *Australia’s Coloured Minority* set a poetical, sentimental tone for the work which is then significantly absent throughout the remainder of the text. *Australia’s Coloured Minority* is tellingly dedicated “to the ‘coloured folks’ of Australia” (5) as opposed to a patron or government official. Genette articulates the underlying function of a dedication as: “the proclamation (sincere or not) of a relationship (of one kind or another) between the author and some person, group, or entity” (135). Further, through dedicating the work to Australia’s “coloured folk,” Neville also gains a degree of authority and legitimation from them: “[t]he dedicatee is always in some way responsible for the work that is dedicated to him and to which he brings, willy-nilly, a little of his support and therefore participation” (Genette 136). The fragment of poetry (by Sir E. Arnold) chosen for the epigraph complements the dedication, describing the unity or “kinship” of all human beings:

Pity and need make all flesh kin.

There is no caste in blood

Which runneth of one hue,

No caste in tears

Which trickle salt with all. (5)

Whilst an epigraph usually reinforces the ideology of the text it prefaces (Genette 157), in this case the epigraph functions to mislead the reader as to the “meaning” of the text. The poem invokes the Christian principle of “one blood,” as articulated in Acts 17:26 – “God hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth” – which, John Harris argues, was a ubiquitous expression for missionaries of the commonality of races (34). Neville identifies himself and his “native” subjects as of one race: humankind. Yet this identification is immediately contradicted by the continual classification and labelling of Indigenous people throughout Neville’s work. The erratic inscription of colonial text is evident here. Neville’s work is an example of what Homi Bhabha calls “uncertain writing” – ambivalent, contradictory writing which acknowledges “an aporia in the inscription of empire” (“Articulating the Archaic” 185). The strange ambiguity of this aporia is shown with the virtually simultaneous harnessing and disavowal of Christian sentiment. The deployment of the epigraph suggests some level of recognition of the lack (and reversal) of such sentiments throughout the text, although not enough to necessitate

change. Further, this ambivalence performs the dual tension at the heart of settler societies—of being both colonising and colonised. Here Neville both invokes and disavows a relationship with or connection to the “colonised.”

The classification and labelling of Indigenous people that contradicts the Christian sentiments of the epigraph begins even before the body of *Australia's Coloured Minority*. The glossary (which precedes the contents page) works to mark the text as specialised, with a need to explain its complexities for the reader. Although arranged alphabetically and apparently engaged in the deceptively simple act of definition, the glossary betrays the articles of highest value to the work. The first word defined is “authority,” which is strategically restricted to a “Department of State or Board concerned with Native Affairs—Government of any Australian State” (7). Neville’s opening move is to locate authority in the government and himself as a former government representative. With his authorial legitimacy established, the glossary then elucidates Neville’s preoccupation with grades and definitions of people through ideas of colour and blood: “‘Black’—A term often applied to the Aboriginal, though the pigmentation of the Aboriginal is not black but dark chocolate brown” (7). This fixation is further elaborated in definitions of “coloured people,” Neville’s stated favourite term for “People of Aboriginal descent but not of the full-blood” (7). Neville’s use of the word “coloured” links his work with

classifications of race in the United States of America (in relation to African-Americans) and to South Africa (in relation to those of “mixed” Indian, African and white descent). Neville then progresses to more explicitly eugenicist terminology, defining “half-blood” and “half-caste” together as “Offspring of full-blood Aboriginal and a white person. Offspring of two persons both half-blood” (7). This zest for labelling and categorising is compounded with definitions for “natives,” “octoroon,” and “quadroon” (8). Bhabha notes Frantz Fanon’s awareness of “the dangers of the fixity and fetishism of identities within the calcification of colonial cultures” (“Introduction” 13). Such identity fetishism is seen here with Neville’s redefinition of the boundaries and fractions of race, and continues within *Australia’s Coloured Minority* in the arguments developed through the work.

Even before the work proper has begun, its contradictory nature is clear. The bizarre juxtaposition of emotive poetry (highlighting the universal nature of blood) with the obsessive categorisation of people through blood fractions shows the complex nature of this colonial project. Neville’s blood fractions are an expression of the linearity of boundaries between settlers and Indigenous people, which can be seen as another, complicated expression of the tension between coloniser and colonised. Their centrality to Neville’s work illustrates the importance of the maintenance of such boundaries, blurred as they are. The constructed nature of these delineations is made apparent in

Elkin's introduction, which echoes Neville's concern with classification and appropriate terminology:

Australia's population includes nearly 30,000 people of mixed White and Aboriginal descent, usually referred to as "half-castes." Better terms would be mixed-bloods, part-Aborigines (part-Whites!) or Coloured Folk. Strictly speaking, half-caste means having equal proportions of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal ancestry. But many of the Coloured Folk are three-quarter caste (usually classified with full-bloods), quarter-caste (quadroon), or eighth-caste (octoroon), meaning that they possess respectively three-quarter, one-quarter or one-eighth Aboriginal ancestry. (Elkin 11)

Elkin's and Neville's reiteration of these particular sets of terminology is significant, for the eugenicist classificatory system is vital for the more pertinent reading and acceptance of the arguments advanced in *Australia's Coloured Minority*.

Neville's monograph is difficult to read today. While the opinions expressed and policies advocated held currency at the time, they are emphatically disturbing when viewed through contemporary value systems. However, the troubling nature of this text is precisely the reason that it deserves critical attention. Repugnant though the views and arguments expressed through *Australia's Coloured Minority* are, they are a central textual expression of an administration directed

toward Indigenous people that has a profound continuing impact on contemporary society. E. Ann Kaplan articulates the seemingly obvious point that “the political-ideological context within which traumatic events occur shapes their impact” (1). This is certainly true for the traumatic events examined within this thesis: legitimated by official, government-sanctioned policy, the political-ideological context of the trauma is overt. Not to subject such work to critical readings and analysis would be itself a disturbing omission. The past, however uncomfortable, must be engaged in debate in order to illuminate the present situation.

There are two particular instances in *Australia's Coloured Minority* which serve as a demonstration of the differences in thinking between Neville's time and the present. Neville twice uses Adolf Hitler's words to support his argument: first, in relation to legislation against miscegenation, Neville writes: “It has often been said that you cannot make people moral by Act of Parliament or, as Hitler once put it, you cannot abolish sexual intercourse by decree nor eliminate the instinct to possess” (49), second, in regard to the attitude of the white community toward the education of the Indigenous population: “It would almost seem as though we were willing to accept Hitler's advice where he says in ‘Mein Kampf,’ that it would be an offence against God and man to educate the native for any of the higher places in civilized life” (152). These unassuming references in Neville's primary work highlight at the

very least some knowledge and acceptance of Hitler's ideas and strategies. They tie Neville's administrative schemes into the global currency that ideas of eugenics and race possessed at this time, and highlight the serious and disturbing nature of Neville's project.

The pedantic concern with terminology and nomenclature, appropriate to the period, exhibited by Neville and Elkin can be contextualised through Thomas Richards' conception of imperial knowledge. Richards suggests that, for imperial civil servants, "theirs was a paper empire: an empire built on a series of flimsy pretexts that were always becoming texts" (4). Bernard Cohn uses the term "investigative modalities" as a way of examining forms of knowledge collection and production used by the British in India to support their rule: "Most investigative modalities were constructed in relation to institutions and administrative sites with fixed routines. Some were transformed into 'sciences' such as economics [and] ethnology" (5). Cohn illustrates the ubiquitous nature of imperial "investigative modalities"; Neville's administration was by no means unique in this respect.

Neville's preoccupation with grades of skin colour (and the proper terminology for these categories) characterises his own particular "investigative modality." As Bhabha reminds us, "Skin, as the key signifier of cultural and racial difference in the stereotype, is the most visible of fetishes, recognised as 'common knowledge'" (112).

Neville goes further than this, however, attempting to transform visible skin as “common knowledge” into rarefied, official knowledge through his detailed nomenclature and corresponding definitions. Neville went so far as to change the definition of the term “native” in his hard-won amendments to the Aborigines Act: “According to the new definition of ‘native’ under the Native Administration Act the returns [regarding population] are summarised under two heads, full-bloods and all others” (*Annual Report for year ending 30 June 1937* 8). He ascribed great importance to this change, explaining it to the 1937 conference regarding Aboriginal welfare held in Canberra, at which representatives from each state (except Tasmania) were present: “as a matter of fact, in the legislation passed last session the term ‘aborigines’ has been discarded altogether; we refer to them as natives whether they be full-blooded or half-caste” (*Aboriginal Welfare* 10). This concern with names culminates in the discursive denial of the Latin “origin” ascribed to the Indigenous population, approaching a discursive attempt at equality in belonging, bringing coloniser and colonised closer together.

Neville’s intense interest in appropriate nomenclature extends to his “absorption” or assimilation project (effected through interbreeding). He states in an article published in *The West Australian*: “[if we] Eliminate the full-blood and permit the white admixture [of blood through interbreeding] eventually the race will become white, always providing the negro, Malay and other coloured races are rigidly

excluded" ("Coloured Folk" 9). The becoming-white of the "mixed-blood" population inevitably entails a further concern with labelling: "What's in a name: it seems to me that the time has come when we must cease calling people who are nearly white and who are practically of the same blood as ourselves, 'aboriginals'" (Neville 245). Neville highlights the importance of classification in aiding the "absorption" of the Indigenous population, working alongside the breeding project. The effect that such constructions of Aboriginal identity might have on the lived experience of individuals can be seen through Fanon's view of the colonial subject, made immediate through the use of the first person: "I am given no chance. I am overdetermined from without" (116).

I utilise Bhabha's description and analysis of the administrative colonial fantasy in order to contextualize Neville's role as Chief Protector of Aborigines / Commissioner of Native Affairs (as well as *Australia's Coloured Minority*). Bhabha articulates the fantasy inherent in the "'official knowledges' of colonialism." Due to the operation of fantasy, the complexities of colonial reality disrupts the logic of knowledge:

the exertions of the "official knowledges" of colonialism—pseudo-scientific, typological, legal-administrative, eugenicist—are imbricated at the point of their production of meaning and power with the fantasy that dramatizes the impossible desire for a pure, undifferentiated origin. ("The Other Question" 116)

Neville's eugenicist project is an expression of the desire to return to a pure origin—the end point being the complete “absorption” of the “mixed race” population into the white community, accompanied by the inevitable extinction of the “pure-blood” Aboriginal population. Bhabha highlights the ambivalence of the colonial fantasy which justifies its existence by simultaneously stating the reformable nature of the indigene under the proper influence of the colonial power, and denying “the colonized the capacities of self-government, independence, [and] Western modes of civility” (118). This strategy highlights the indigene's “need” for benevolent advancement through colonial governance by the enforced “separation” between races (118). One of the final statements in *Australia's Coloured Minority* articulates this ambivalence of colonial power: “[will the natives continue to be] a constant sore spot upon our civilization, always maintained more or less at the country's expense—or are we going to elevate them to their proper place in the community? That is the question” (262).

Surveillance and Micromanagement: A.O. Neville's Official Correspondence.

Neville's colonial discourse and his classificatory “investigative modality” function as an attempt to maintain and increase the power and surveillance of his administration. In “The Other Question,” Bhabha argues that the predominant strategic function of colonial

discourse “is the creation of a space for a ‘subject peoples’ through the production of knowledges in terms of which surveillance is exercised” (100). Neville’s surveillance and control of matters of minutiae is here demonstrated through excerpts from the archival records of his administration. Neville is in constant communication with the Superintendent of the Moore River Native Settlement, a central government institution in Western Australia that housed Indigenous people (many of whom were separated from their families through Neville’s child removal policy). He writes many letters and makes visits, controlling the lives of those who reside at the settlement to the smallest degree. The desire for regimented, detailed order can be glimpsed in the strict adherence to the conventions of letter writing seen in all of Neville’s correspondence: dates, concern for correct modes of address, and a statement of his title adorn every fragment examined. Like other mechanisms of social order, such formal concerns evince Neville’s attempted control of both discursive and administrative spaces.

Thomas’s “strategy of reading” (x) is echoed in my analysis of the archival material surrounding Neville’s administration. Thomas unapologetically highlights his “accumulation from diverse sources of insights and strategies that are recontextualized, no doubt often in a fashion that fails to reflect their original authors’ or producers’ concerns, yet makes them available to new projects and new ends” (x).

My examination of Neville's correspondence works in two, connected, ways. First, it gives the correspondence a wider, critical, audience than a simple presence in the archives, and second, it challenges the theories and assumptions with which Neville's texts operate. While a glance at the archives may find evidence of a powerful, organised administration, I argue that a closer examination highlights the multitude of ways in which this control is often projected rather than realised.

In a letter to the Superintendent of the Moore River Native Settlement, Neville archly notes that more should be done to improve the settlement's appearance:

When I was at the Settlement on the 10th inst. I saw quite a good deal of rubbish about the Settlement, particularly at the native village and under the cottages. As you have a fair number of men who are not fully employed at the Settlement I would suggest that you arrange for them to be organised into gangs to clear up and burn the rubbish. No doubt also a few of them could water the ornamental trees. (*Moore River Correspondence* 83)

Throughout the many letters sent between himself and Moore River, Neville appears to be a prime example of colonial governance as surveillance. He makes it his business to know even minute details about the workings of the settlement. For instance, on 15 September

1937, he wrote to the Superintendent of the Moore River Native Settlement:

Will you kindly let me know what is done in the way of providing handkerchiefs for the inmates of the Settlement. On Monday and Tuesday when at Moore River I noticed a few cases of very dirty noses and apparently the children had no means of keeping themselves clean. I have no doubt that if the handkerchiefs were provided many of them would be lost and it has occurred to me that possibly this might be overcome if the handkerchief were sewn onto the garment by way of a tape. (*Moore River Correspondence* 62)

The case of the handkerchiefs—seemingly trivial, and perhaps kindly intentioned—demonstrates the paternalistic, controlling, almost obsessive, nature of Neville, a man who does not delegate such mundane tasks but must undertake them himself. A later letter confirms his exacting approach:

re. handkerchiefs I have to advise that 50 yards of material, 36 inches wide, for making some have been ordered. As a handkerchief is 9" square, a total of 800 should be made up from the material being forwarded. (*Moore River Correspondence* 68)

That this control extends into more vital aspects of the lives of Indigenous people is inevitable as the Chief Protector (at this stage called the Commissioner of Native Affairs) was the legal guardian of all

Aboriginal people in Western Australia. Marriage was one particular instance for which Neville's explicit (written) approval was required to attain legal status. A 1937 letter from Neville to the Reverend Hardy of Perth's Forrest River Mission serves as an example:

I received your letter (undated) enclosing details forwarded by the Superintendent of Forrest River Mission respecting certain marriages recommended by him to the Bishop of the North-West, and seeking my approval thereto. These are dealt with seriatim hereunder: Kate and Andrew: I have no objection to this marriage and in fact have wired to Wyndham in order to ascertain whether the matter can be expedited, as I have a position available for this young couple at Derby Native Hospital. John and Mary: No objection. Daniel and Molly: I object to this marriage on the grounds that Molly is a half-caste and Daniel is a full-blood, and this is in keeping with the decisions of the recent conference of authorities on Native Matters held at Canberra. Colin and Elizabeth: No objection. Conrad and Susan: No objection. Donald and Daffodil: No objection, providing Daffodil's mother Polly consents in the presence of witnesses. Alex. Menmuir and Elsie: No objection. (*Marriages between Aboriginals or Half-Castes & others*, 34)

This is an explicit example of Neville exercising his power to its fullest extent, determining precisely which individuals could be married and

the reasoning behind the decisions. When juxtaposed with Neville's treatment of other, trivial, matters, it becomes evident that the precise style by which he determines the details does not change in accordance to the relative importance of the subject at hand. No item is too minute to be dealt with by the Chief Protector.

The over-reaching nature of Neville's administration is articulated through his desire for even greater levels of surveillance: "I am quite convinced that there has never been throughout Australia enough inspection, not only of native institutions of all kinds, but of places where native people are employed, or are camped or residing" (Neville 218). Instead of a powerful, controlling embodiment of colonial governance, what emerges is an excessive figure employing the same distant bureaucratic tone and officiousness to all facets of his colonial project, regardless of the farcical results:

The Manager, Mills & Wares, Fremantle.

Dear Sir, I should be glad to receive your cheque for £1.2.0 in respect to eight empty biscuit tins valued at 2/9 each, which were returned from Moore River Native Settlement, and for which we hold your credit note No. A 4240 dated May 20th. Yours faithfully,
Chief Protector of Aborigines. (*Moore River Correspondence* 49)

Neville's desire for heightened surveillance and rigid protocols betrays an underlying anxiety about the impossibility of controlling those under his administration—the entire, diverse Indigenous

population. As Ian Duffield notes, an administration does not view its subjects totally, in fact there are notable gaps in official vision. This reflects on the status of the administration: “[s]ince they were imperfectly seen by officials, official comprehension and control were also imperfect” (119). Similarly, Thomas reminds us to be wary of ascribing an overly unitary dominance to colonial governance, highlighting instead its fissured nature:

colonialism should [not] be seen “as a cultural system” if that would imply a coherent symbolic order. It is not simply the fundamental division of interest between colonizer and colonized that invariably differentiates and fractures constructions of colonial projects and relationships. Colonizers have also frequently been divided by strategic interests and differing visions of the civilising mission. (2)

The incoherence and uncertainty of this particular colonial project is further illustrated by Neville’s anxious assertions of white belonging and superiority: “The oft repeated statement that we have taken the land from the natives does not carry any reproach with it since the natives never knew how to use their lands, and any way they had to give way to the migrant race” (*Report re Press Cuttings* 1). The dual reasoning employed here shows a need to convince, bringing to light a series of doubts and insecurities about the legitimacy of the settler society.

Colonisers create their own others, continually disrupting the solid boundaries desired by colonial fantasy, as Thomas notes: “fundamentally, colonizing constantly generated obstacles to neat boundaries and hierarchies between populations, exemplified by ‘degenerate’ half-castes and frontier whites who were anything but civilised” (2). This undoing of boundaries requires more policing, enacted in Neville’s text through classification (with accompanying photographic evidence), of those of “mixed descent,” with an eye to their eventual disappearance through eugenics-inspired breeding programs (and an ultimate return to the neat boundaries). Thomas emphasises the destabilising effect that reality has on the ideals and expectations of colonial governance or a colonial project:

government is not a unitary work but heterogeneous and partial, and moreover that the meanings engendered by hegemonic codes and narratives do not exist in hermetic domains but are placed at risk, revalued and distorted, through being enacted and experienced. (4)

Particular anecdotes that Neville narrates throughout *Australia’s Coloured Minority* highlight the ways in which experience distorts hegemonic meanings.

Neville undermines his own project while attempting to show the simplicity of the native mind, describing Indigenous resistance to the

religious practices imposed by missions on their inmates, and thus unconsciously highlighting Indigenous agency:

Many natives seem to think that it is enough to conform with the accepted [religious] practice only while within the precincts of a mission or settlement. Once I was riding away from a Northern mission, accompanied by a native. It was a beautiful evening, and the Angelus rang sweetly on the still air. I turned to my native companion and suggested that as it was the hour of evening prayer he might feel like stopping for a moment to continue the practice learned at the Mission. His answer was brief and to the point: "No damn fear, Boss; I'm not at the mission now." (Neville 117)

Neville uses this first-person passage to represent himself—he is constructed as appropriately religious, appreciative of the natural beauty of the night, kindly suggesting to his companion the possibility of prayer (rather than ordering him to pray). The "native" in this micronarrative exists as an other against whom to define the self—a useful aid to Neville's self-representation. In practice, however, Neville unwittingly provides evidence of a sophisticated and nuanced Aboriginal response to colonial spaces and ideologies, giving the reader access to what Duffield calls "high-density micro-narrative[s]" (120), which have a "latent capacity to surface and challenge existing power relations" (134).

The department's policy of child removal—the subject of much deserved criticism and debate, most officially in *Bringing Them Home: A Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families*, published in 1997—was central to Neville's administration. His aspirations for a eugenics-inspired “solution” to the Aboriginal “problem” were based on the dual policies of marriage control and child removal. In a lengthy anecdote from *Australia's Coloured Minority*, Neville describes his personal investment in the policy.

I once had rather an amusing experience with the mother of a neglected child. ... I had found a quadroon baby in a native camp, neglected and abandoned by its mother, and had the infant removed and placed in a home for white children where it grew up to become a well-mannered, educated girl. The mother, who had visited the child occasionally against the wishes of the management of the institution, managed to abduct the girl now eighteen years of age, with the object of marrying her to a native lad she herself had selected. Naturally, after all the years of effort spent in winning this three-parts white away from native life, I had to take a hand and restore the girl to the institution. The mother repeated the offence. ... We had many talks about the matter, she and I, and after the last episode she turned to me and said, “Well you took her from me twice, and I took her from you

as often, so I reckon it's square and that's all right, you can keep her now." (Neville 171)

Neville again unwittingly inscribes the actuality of Indigenous resistance in his relating of his "amusing experience" of the complexities of child removal, highlighting the determination of the mother to remain in contact with and to rescue her child from Neville's "protection." The difficulties of reading such traumatic material are many, particularly due to the context of such stories: presented as an amusing anecdote by the man who actively (and repeatedly) intervened to remove the girl from her mother. In this context, obviously, there can be no reply or rebuttal from the unnamed mother. Neville's words indicating her continued resistance to governmental policy, as well as his commitment and zeal with which he removed this child, highlight the complex nature of Neville's self-representation and his administration. Such instances in Neville's text evoke fears such as Kaplan's that highly charged colonial works might contaminate "critical discourse through inserting a repetition of oppression" (111). I submit that the risks of such discourse contamination are outweighed by the prospect of the elision of emotive aspects of the past through an approach which privileges an avoidance of such incidents out of concern to limit any "repetition of oppression."

A Strategic Multiplicity: A.O. Neville's Self-Fashioning.

Neville begins his first chapter of *Australia's Coloured Minority* with regrets that "so few of our own people as a whole are aware" of the lot of the "coloured man," despite the fact that "we have had the coloured man amongst us for a hundred years and more" (21). As well as positioning himself as one of a select number of "our own people" who are aware of the situation, the passage implies that it is the white settlers who were the original inhabitants of Australia and the "coloured people" the intruders. Throughout the text Neville constructs himself in a bewildering variety of ways, each serving to highlight a new facet of his character in an attempt to recommend himself and his theories to the reader. The cultural work that the varied representations of Neville performs is that of personalising, making accessible the man behind the bureaucracy. The proliferation of representations and anecdotes reveals a concerted attempt to gain the support of the reader. One example is his self-representation as a lone, dedicated protector of the Indigenous population: "I know how difficult it all is because I have experienced the many heartbreaks of an enthusiastic protagonist. Those charged with the care of natives continually have to suffer setbacks" (82). Tellingly, even this somewhat smug statement reveals the instability of his administration—rather than running smoothly, it is plagued by constant setbacks. Neville also emphasises the length of his

career in a simultaneously self-effacing and self-congratulatory statement: "For twenty-five years I watched over the destinies of the native race in Western Australia. ... I believe the foundations of a new structure were laid for others to build upon" (38). The text is interspersed with first-person comments, anecdotes, and snippets of Neville's life. His personal desire for control and sense of urgency are brought to the foreground when he recounts his interaction with other sections of government: "It took me twelve years to get a bill before Parliament aiming at the amendment of the existing Native Law. I have watched a whole generation of children grow up, with little or no real advancement for the majority of them" (37).

In other domains, too, he worked to convey his obsession to the public and convince them of the need for action. The final sentence of a newspaper article he wrote for *The West Australian* urges the public to take an interest: "Hundreds of [mixed-race] children are to-day approaching adolescence. What is to become of them?" ("Coloured Folk" 9). In another article Neville seeks to educate readers about the magnitude of the "mixed-race" problem, stating that it amounts to a "distinct menace to our healthy virile youth," feeding a fear of being overrun by an ever-increasing number of part-Aboriginal people: "We have reached the stage when the fecund nature of these people is becoming more apparent" ("Remarkable Fecundity" 10). That these articles are couched in such urgent tones, to evangelise and convince,

brings to the fore Neville's need for public support—the articles do not assume the agreement of readers, instead they work to persuade.

The biographical anecdotes that are liberally scattered throughout *Australia's Coloured Minority* are another, more overt, site of Neville's ever-changing self-representation. In a biographical passage dealing with his childhood Neville places himself in a tradition of adventure and empire:

[when I was a child] We had a large house, and it was often full of ardent advocates of aid to missions. Naturally I imbibed quite a romantic view of the mission field and the workers of the great Missionary Societies, as well as of such men as Stanley, Livingstone, Carey, Gordon—heroes all to us boys thirsting for adventure; and there were eight of us, all but one of whom left England for one or other part of the Empire. (95)

By invoking the image of himself as an admirer of imperial “heroes,” Neville insinuates that his thirst for adventure was quenched by his worthwhile and exciting experiences as Chief Protector of Aborigines. Neville's romantic self-representation as imperial adventurer mobilises colonising tropes: visions of white men striding forth over “unexplored” lands, where both adventurer and coloniser are imbued with a notion of freedom and power. Yet Neville's self-representation is more often utterly bureaucratic. Bureaucracy is stereotypically characterised by its restrictive, repetitive, sometimes illogical or

counter-intuitive forms, policies, and processes. Thus Neville as bureaucratic administrator is (in a very different way) equally constrained by his administrative desire for details and procedure as those under his administration. Further, the tightly structured, hierarchical nature of the State Government bureaucracy also serves to highlight the many strata above the level of Chief Protector, ultimately extending back to Britain. Both of these conditions of bureaucracy consolidate Neville's position under colonial rule.

Neville is not adverse to some judicious self-congratulation, relating his statement to a "crowded Synod meeting" where "my remarks received gratifying applause from the large body of unbiased churchmen present" (109). Such statements elide the extent to which Neville's eugenicist policies and theories of blood-fractions directly contradict the Christian ideal of "one blood," instead emphasising his popularity and religiosity. Neville relates lapses in judgement of other authority figures in the field with considerable relish, for as well as being sensational stories they serve, through contrast, to show Neville's own rationality and self-control:

It has been my unfortunate duty to dismiss promptly more than one manager [of government institutions], and not on suspicion either. One Superintendent I had, because he suspected him of some moral lapse, tarred and feathered a native, and he did the job thoroughly, calling the staff to see the rare bird he had

captured. ... [the native] had to be larded and rubbed for days to be rid of the tar and feathers with which the Superintendent had plastered him from head to foot. (112)

Neville simultaneously identifies with these figures, however, showing his understanding of the difficult circumstances in which they operate: "Another Manager I did appoint, an ex-Missionary, and a good man, too, I had to dismiss for chaining girls to table legs. His was not a very serious offence, but because it occurred in the centre of a settled white community action had to be taken" (113). The traumatic acts mentioned here are shocking to a contemporary audience, however, the oblique way in which they are mentioned suggests that such a reaction would not be expected at the time of publication. Neville uses the passage to subtly emphasise his own sensibilities, through his realisation that despite the minor nature of the offence, the situation requires his action. That Neville includes such stories in his published monograph highlights the complexities of his representation of himself and his project. He is at once the driven, benevolent administrator; the distant bureaucrat, obsessed with the smallest details; and a man with the greatest level of control over the lives of many, nonchalantly showing his indifference in his defence of the ex-missionary who chains girls to table legs.

Neville calls his readers into being by addressing them directly, hailing them, in Louis Althusser's terms. For Althusser,

ideology “acts” or “functions” in such a way that it “recruits” subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all), or “transforms” the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) by that very precise operation [of] *interpellation* or hailing, and which can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing: “Hey, you there!” (174).

Neville simultaneously illustrates the business of Native Affairs and his policy of intervening in the lives of young Indigenous people, and transforms his readers into ideological subjects through his use of the second-person: “You have so many people to be cared for. Is it not better to care for them in their early years so that they will be no further liability upon you thereafter, than to have to sponsor and spoon-feed them all their lives?” (155) This is another example of Neville’s representation of himself which fuses together Neville, the colonial project, and the white reader. As a number of the texts subsequently examined demonstrate, this is a colonial phantasm: some white readers would seek to differentiate themselves from Neville’s eugenicist fantasies, and Aboriginal readers would seek to re-appropriate their image and (overdetermined) identity from Neville’s discursive and practical regime. Both Neville and his project are powerful and conflicted, and these characteristics (as will be seen in the following chapters) are carried over into the many fictional representations of A.O. Neville and his work.

Chapter 2: **Assimilating A.O. Neville: *Benang*'s Unsettling Representation**

This chapter focuses on Kim Scott's 1999 novel *Benang: From the Heart*, in which the figure of A.O. Neville is central. This chapter connects the first chapter's concern with archival representation to the examination of a fictional text which strategically engages with the historical archive. *Benang* was released to significant public acclaim, evident in its receipt of both the Western Australian Premier's Book Award and the Miles Franklin Award in 2000. Scott was the first Indigenous winner of the Miles Franklin Award. *Benang* is a multi-layered, self-reflexive work that explicitly engages with, and frequently rewrites or reconstructs, the archival material surrounding Neville and his policies. John Donnelly situates *Benang* in the context of its production and time of release: "Scott's story could not be more timely, in the aftermath of the Stolen Generations report and the national anxiety and political cynicism surrounding the proposed constitutional preamble acknowledging indigenous occupation of Australia" (30). Tony Birch specifically highlights the presence of Neville in Scott's novel as doing important cultural work: "*Benang* provides an insight into the anxieties over race and miscegenation that pervade the white Australian conscience, as seen through the characterization of A.O. Neville" ("The First White Man Born" 150).

I draw upon Linda Hutcheon's work regarding historiographic metafiction when discussing the fictional texts in which the figure of Neville appears as a central character, as Neville's presence necessitates an engagement with history. However, I argue for the particular relevance of Hutcheon's category "historiographic metafiction" to *Benang*. For Hutcheon, such texts thematise their "interaction both with the historical past and with the historically conditioned expectations of its readers" ("Historiographic Metafiction" 231). *Benang* continually plays with both its fictional and historical status as well as the reader's expectations of the text and of history. *Benang's* interaction with discourses of truth and history are most apparent when Scott refers to and quotes from *Australia's Coloured Minority* and archival material from Neville's administration. Hutcheon argues for the power inherent in both fictional and non-fictional representations of the past: "Postmodern fiction suggests that to re-write or to re-present the past in fiction and in history is, in both cases, to open it up to the present, to prevent it from being conclusive and teleological" ("Pastime" 497). The representation of Neville at the centre of Scott's novel opens up the past to critique. It makes history and the figure of Neville available to further examination and analysis, rather than taking Neville and his policies at his word and seeing only his avowed benevolence. Further, I argue that *Benang's* representation of Neville, when viewed in relation to the central Indigenous characters, becomes a strategy by which the

novel addresses the dual anxiety endemic to settler society: of being “both colonizer and colonized” (Bhabha, “The Other Question” 108).

Benang is an act of rewriting: an unsettling, destabilising portrayal of Neville’s eugenicist project. Scott’s formulation of Neville and his administration, particularly through the use of blended fictional and non-fiction correspondence, can be seen as a subversive form of representation. *Benang*’s staging of Neville, his policies, and his bureaucratic artefacts is subtly different to Neville’s self-representation, and as such it changes and undermines Neville’s established construction of himself. Scott cunningly appropriates and alters Neville’s works, reanimating in order to deconstruct. It is the uncanny resemblance to Neville’s project and bureaucratic machinations that enables *Benang*’s destabilisation of Neville, rewriting his benign “civilising mission” as cruel. *Benang* emphatically disrupts, and discloses the ambivalence of, Neville’s colonial discourse and authority through its rewriting and appropriation, making the uncertainty and incoherence of his colonial project more apparent.

A number of critics have noted the importance of the character of A.O. Neville to Scott’s novel. Lisa Slater argues for the significance of Neville’s presence in *Benang*, stating: “[b]y inserting A.O. Neville into his novel, Scott is not only introducing readers to a key historical figure in the abuse of Nyoongar people, he is also mimicking Neville’s colonial discursive strategy of catching and containing Indigenous

people" ("Most Local" 56). Scott is not alone in his utilisation of the character of Neville for a work of fiction, of course, but his is one of the most successful and most critically and publicly acclaimed.

In an interview with Jill Kitson in 2001 for Radio National, Scott drew attention to Neville's central role in *Benang*, and the archival research that he undertook while writing the novel: "[t]he archives are the written language of our shared history. In W.A. the voice of one A.O. Neville dominates ... he wrote a book called *Australia's Coloured Minority: Their Place in Our Community* [sic]. The title is instructive, isn't it? Their place, our community" (Kitson).²

Throughout *Benang* the representation of Neville is intertwined with the character of Ernest Solomon Scat. Scat is the grandfather of the narrator, Harley, and it soon becomes apparent that he has undertaken his own personal breeding project, inspired by Neville's argument for policy based on eugenics. Scott emphasises a direct connection between the characters of Mr Ernest Solomon Scat and Mr Auber Neville, highlighting through Scat the sordid details of the implementation of Neville's eugenicist project. The representations of Neville and Scat

² Scott here, and, more problematically, in the Acknowledgements to *Benang*, strengthens his representation of Neville by subtly altering the sub-title of his monograph from *Its Place in the Community* to *Their Place in Our Community*, making the title less abstract, more personal and obviously exclusionary. This change, perhaps a continuation of the text's postmodern playfulness, amounts to either poor scholarship or a deliberate rhetorical device. The latter appears to be an unnecessary embellishment, as Neville's work offers a myriad of examples of his non-inclusive (or, through eugenics, his overly inclusive) ideas and policies, seemingly removing the need to alter the title to emphasise this point.

blur, so that where one is mentioned the other is equally characterised: “‘It depends on the genes, you see,’ said ... Auber. At another time it might even have been Ern, ‘Theirs is recessive’” (47). Scat and Neville are represented ungrammatically, subtly casting doubt upon their supposed scientific rigour and claims for superiority. The novel contains many slight subversions such as this, which reinforce the obvious truth that even the English are not necessarily masters of the language, undermining binary notions of language usage by settlers and Aborigines. Harley informs the reader of Neville’s impact on his grandfather (and, consequently, on himself): “Whatever the confusions of my genealogy, there seems little doubt that my grandfather intended to be my creator. It was he who, if not indeed forming the idea, applied it as Mr Neville was unable to do” (32).

Tellingly, Scott brings Scat and Neville together at foundational moments, early in the novel, showing them side-by-side in the creation of the Department’s bureaucratic centre:

Ernest Solomon Scat ... with his arm inserted in the filing system, up to the elbow in the documents of the very respectable Auber Neville’s office. My grandfather, so recently arrived from his own country, had come to his distant relation Mr AO Neville, the Chief Protector of Aborigines, no less, and—until recently—chief of a department representing the odd combination of the North-west *and* Aborigines *and* Fisheries. (37)

Scott places Neville and Scat together from the beginning, although only “distant relations” they both build the shelves for Neville’s filing system: “[Scat] helped construct the shelving—he and his distant cousin both being accomplished amateur carpenters—and was now temporarily employed in clerical duties with the department” (38). Scat and Neville have similar skills and aptitudes, reinforcing their mutual representation. Neville actively encourages Scat and influences his choices toward the path that he takes: “Ern found himself needing advice, reassurance, further security. He returned to the city, for a few short weeks, and did a little work for that good friend of the family, Auber Neville” (118). Neville is constructed as the catalyst for Scat’s project. As John Fielder notes, Neville’s representational conflation with Scat is one of the ways in which Scott “re-frames the rectitude of Neville’s motives.” Neville is associated with and implicated in the moral corruption of his policies and their implementation.

As well as consistently representing Neville alongside Scat, Scott also characterises Neville as multi-faceted: at times powerful and in control, at others as a ridiculous figure. He also utilises the common rhyme of “devil” with Neville, highlighting his abuse of (and desire for) power: “The Chief, devil Neville, allowed himself a grin” (123). In contrast to this representation are others that show a less secure Chief Protector: “Mr Auber Neville had obviously not reached so high as the family believed. The entire department was a verandah and two small

rooms. Clearly it was an impoverished and unimportant one" (39). Neville's diminished role is further emphasised through an inventory of his employees: "Auber's staff consisted of a secretary, two clerks, and a travelling inspector, with numerous 'Local Protectors'—usually police, not answerable to his authority—scattered everywhere" (39). Harley indulges in a moment that draws on the tropes of historical fiction, linking the construction of the rail network in Western Australia with the central historical character, Neville: "Ah, the railway. Once it was shining and new, and so was the Chief Protector, Mr Neville when he first travelled it" (322). While this passage can be read as a reasonably straightforward equation of Neville with "progress" and modernity, it is also a way of showing Neville's antiquated nature—he is current when the railway was new, so therefore is now obsolete. The railway is now rusty and dull (322), not shining and new, highlighting the frailty of such constructs and administrators when considered next to the enduring landscape. The abundance of interpretations available for this passage is an example of the many complex representations of Neville throughout *Benang*.

The complexity of these images of Neville appears to pose difficulties in criticism. Slater claims Neville as a eugenicist first and foremost, constructing his work as "A.O. Neville's eugenicist manifesto, *Australia's Coloured Minority*" ("Most Local" 52). That Neville's work functions as an "eugenicist manifesto" may be correct, though such a

simple definition of the work closes down its other possibilities, and potentially (and somewhat ironically) gives the work more power, constructing it as a coherent, focused document. Scott, through *Benang*, lingers more on the absurdities and human frailty of Neville's role, work and character, positioning *Australia's Coloured Minority* with its flaws and farce foremost and amplified for all to appreciate. Slater notes the power inherent in the character of Neville (and, by association, Scat), especially seen through his scientific, eugenicist project: "The project of eugenics further offers him the possibility of controlling the chaotic process of identity making" ("Strange Men" 364). While this is undeniably the case, an approach that privileges the power of the character of Neville denies the multiplicity of Neville's representation throughout Scott's novel. *Benang* in fact challenges the power that Slater sees in the worldview of eugenics, exposing its lacks, problems and its cruelty. Yet Slater does bring to light the ways in which Neville's and Scat's systems of value and belief inhibit their implementation of their colonial project: "Their adherence to the eugenicist logic is what enables the Nyoongar people to escape complete subsumption by colonial discourse" ("Strange Men" 367).

One of the more subtle ways in which Scott undermines Neville's characterisation as a powerful, controlling figure is to bring the attention of the reader to Neville's unusual first name, stripping him of his preferred nomenclature—"A.O."—an act which serves to make

Neville more vulnerable, more human. It also functions as a subtle act of redefinition, and as a sign of Scott's refusal to accept Neville on his own terms:

Ern was a shrewd man, see. Newly arrived, and he had already contacted his cousin Auber, found employment with him in construction and information storage, and become acquainted with—if not yet enthusiastic about—Auber's expert opinions on the need for both social and biological *absorption* of the Native Race. (43)

The representation of Neville here is personal—Ern's cousin Auber—rather than the official construction present through Neville's archival correspondence: A.O. Neville, Chief Protector of Aborigines. Other instances of the destabilisation of Neville's self-representation throughout *Benang* are frequently accompanied by reference to Neville's first name.

Scott shows his awareness of textual conventions and readerly expectations, conferring emphasis and importance to particular words and phrases, directing the attention of the reader by employing italics. He uses this device strategically throughout *Benang*, highlighting contemporary eugenicist terms by italicising them, and linking these more abstract words with their disturbing meanings through the selective use of italics, as Harley narrates:

Ern savoured James Segal's story as he never did mine ... tales of courage and the treachery of the outback; of the *blacks*, both good and bad; of *full-bloods* dying out; of the despised and destitute *half-castes*. He listened to stories of the confidences and velvet skins of the women; of the scientific rationale behind his talk of breeding. (46-47)

Scott shifts from vaguely euphemistic terms such as "half-caste" to the unequivocally pejorative and homogenising term "nigger": "Sergeant Hall was proud that there was no *nigger* problem in his town" (72). The effect of such instances is to firmly situate Neville's discourse of eugenics as discriminatory and racist, destabilising Neville's self-representation as a benevolent figure.

The section "what reason" in *Benang* is one of several that actively engages with archival material—it consists of a series of letters between Jack Chatalong (one of Harley's forebears), A.O. Neville and the Under Secretary of the Department of Aborigines and Fisheries. The correspondence reproduced in *Benang* concerns Jack's request for exemption from being classified as an Aborigine under the 1905 Aborigines Act (Scott 62-67). In this section, and throughout the novel, Scott moves between fiction and history (in the form of departmental correspondence), blending the two together to advance his representation of Neville and his argument about the equivalent values of history and fiction. Scott simultaneously brings to the fore the

contested and constructed nature of truth and the material selected for inclusion in the archives.

Madeleine Byrne, however, sees the presence of archival documents (chiefly correspondence) throughout *Benang* as having three clear effects: “to reinforce the historical foundation of Scott’s work, to disrupt the narrative and make it strange, and finally, to remind us of the all-encompassing reality of colonial surveillance” (113). Perhaps, however, while the presence of archival material may offer some “historical foundation” to *Benang*, Scott’s fictionalising of some of the correspondence, and the strategic intermingling of the “truthful” archival material and its fictional counterpart, reinforces not the work’s historical foundation but rather the impossibility of a truthful, complete historical reality to be found in the archives, and gives fiction and history equal value in a representation of the past. Donnelly suggests that the work *Benang* does with history differs greatly from a claim for legitimacy through historical grounding: “Scott ... [is] crafting a recovered and imagined history from official correspondence and records of Aboriginal protection officers, [and] police” (29). While Byrne’s assertion that the letters “disrupt the narrative” is correct, it is a disruption that works in two ways—disrupting the story told by the archival correspondence as well as by the fictional narrative. Byrne’s suggestion that the letters in *Benang* “remind us of the all-encompassing reality of colonial surveillance” does not take sufficiently into account

that the novel and the letters continually reinforce the gaps and holes in colonial surveillance, highlighting the many instances where members of Harley's family disappear from the view of the colonial administrators, and where the administrators' scientific and rational capabilities break down.

Similarly, while Slater concisely states that "Scott assimilates the real A.O. Neville's texts into his novel and deploys them for his own intentions" ("Most Local" 57), she does not provide any evidence to support her claims. One example (that Slater does not provide) of the way Scott's assimilation and deployment of Neville's texts is evident is in the transfer of his photographs and their captions to the character of Scat in *Benang*. In *Australia's Coloured Minority* Neville has as a centrepiece a series of photographs that are employed to support the argument for a eugenicist "solution" to the "native problem" put forward throughout the work. As Susan Sontag reminds us, "[t]o photograph is to appropriate the thing photographed. It means putting oneself into a certain relation to the world that feels like knowledge—and, therefore, like power" (4).

Scott appropriates these photographs and their chillingly distant labels and gives them to Scat as part of his categorising and record keeping of his own eugenicist project, his family breeding experiment. Harley is shocked to discover Scat's photographs, and describes them in detail:



Fig. 1. Three Generations, photograph from A.O. Neville, *Australia's Coloured Minority* (Sydney: Currawong, 1947).



Fig. 2. Three Quadroon Sisters, photograph from A.O. Neville, *Australia's Coloured Minority* (Sydney: Currawong, 1947).

There were portraits arranged in pairs; one a snapshot labelled *As I found them*, the other a studio photograph captioned *Identical with above child*. There were families grouped according to skin colour. And, sudden enough to startle me, my own image. (25-26)

The text that describes the images is given particular weight: "A caption beneath my father's photograph: *Octoroon grandson (mother quarter caste [No. 2], father Scottish). Freckles on the face are the only trace of colour apparent*" (26). The descriptions of Scat's photographs and their discursive framework are almost identical to Neville's. One of many photographic plates in *Australia's Coloured Minority* is titled "Three Generations (Reading from Right to Left)" and the description of the youngest generation is: "Octoroon [sic] Grandson— (Father Australian of Irish descent; Mother No. 2)." Other captions include: "Three Quadroon Sisters: Father—Half-blood (first cross); Mother—Australian White. The large freckles on the face are the only trace of colour apparent," and "First Cross Half-blood Girls: The girl on the right of this picture is identical with the figure on right in above [photograph]." Captions are crucial in situating photography, and, in this case, are explicitly limiting. Sontag highlights the inherently restrictive nature of captions: "even an entirely accurate caption is only one interpretation, necessarily a limiting one, of the photograph to which it is attached" (109). Scott effectively removes Neville's carefully detached, scientific construction of the photographs and makes them utterly personal,

giving stories and identities to the people formerly represented only for their descent. That Harley's image is among this eugenicist catalogue brings attention to the effect upon individuals that this breeding project has in the fictional world of the novel. Through this appropriation and deployment Scott removes the detached, objective veneer of science to highlight the impact of Neville's and Scat's classification of individuals for their eugenicist project.

Scott highlights his deliberate strategy of representation for re- (or de-) construction in *Benang*: "I am going to use his [Neville's] language and turn it back on itself, I am going to rip his ideas to pieces" (qtd. in Byrne 114). Scott makes clear to the reader the distasteful quality of Neville's classification of people. He informs our understanding of Neville's choice of words, putting them into context with similar, more obviously pejorative, phrases. Scott uses the language of Neville's *Australia's Coloured Minority* in Scat's classification of Tommy's wife: "Although not one of a *coloured minority*, she was—he'd say—white trash" (405). Scott explicitly details some of the various strategies that he employs in order to destabilise Neville and his policies. One of the ways in which this is metaphorised in *Benang* is through Harley's "*propensity* for elevation" (12)—he is not bound by the laws of gravity but floats upwards, drifting with the breeze. Scott states in an interview:

I wanted to take on Neville and defuse the potency of all the

written stuff and that [emphasis on] uplift and elevation, I thought, I'll just do that. I'll take it literally. That helped me get out of the straightjacket of staying within his terms ... it allows me just in writing to get out of some of the limitations of Neville's sort of language. ("Ramona Koval Interview" 49)

Yet, there is a danger in opening Neville and his discourse up to the present, as Fielder notes:

It is daring of Scott to reanimate the absorptionist line of thinking in his second novel *Benang*, even if he is using colonialist discourses against themselves. For Scott, this is a risky enterprise, as he plays with the way he, and many others, are the historical products of such policies, practices, ideologies.

Fielder enumerates the riskiness of Scott's venture—that the danger lies in the resistance to the strategic revival of Neville's eugenicist discourse: "there will be people who do not believe that such thinking, such ideas, ought to be reanimated." Or, perhaps, even mentioned at all. Crucially, however, *Benang* reanimates in order to deconstruct, thus lessening the power of the discourse that it revives. As for the assertion that it is better not to examine such fraught and disturbing aspects of Australia's past, it is an argument for selective amnesia. The continual return of the figure of Neville in a myriad of fictional works is both a reaction to and a symptom of such amnesiac tendencies.

Another way in which *Benang* deconstructs Neville's power and self-representation is through Scott's continual conflation of Neville's and Scat's eugenic fervour with sexuality and desire. This construction refuses any dignity or respect that might flow from the supposed scientific values of eugenics, instead firmly grounding Scat and Neville in the intimate, sordid nature of their work:

Ern, if he considered it at all, would say his interest had been aroused by Auber Neville and the words of the Travelling Inspector. He would never admit to the way his thoughts curled back to the memory of his first night off the ship, and –stiff and obstinate – returned to his present loneliness. (79)

As well as conflating eugenics and desire (and Scat and Neville), this passage uses Neville's first name. This detail further reinforces the personal nature of Neville's and Scat's work, undermining their claim to rationality and scientific detachment. Scat's first night off the ship is presented a number of times throughout *Benang*, each representation adding to the others to eventually create an image of rape. One of the instances reads: "Someone asked Ern, 'Have you seen the camps?' 'No,' Ern said, quickly, remembering the first night. The dirt on his bare knees, and how she turned her head away as her body took his thrusts" (50). These quotations highlight Scat's (and by association Neville's) base motives for pursuing an interest in eugenics, and show his longing for power and possession as enacted through his rape of the unknown

Indigenous woman. That Scat recalls this incident when thinking about eugenics explicitly reinforces this link. Desire and lust intertwine with the pseudo-science of eugenics more overtly, with Scat's characterisation strategically linked to that of Neville:

Although he took no notes, Ern was—discreetly—observing Topsy, and—doubtless—did so as dispassionately as the scientist of whom Mr Neville wrote: *with his trained mind and keen desire to exert his efforts in the field investigating native culture and in studying the life history of the species, supplies an aid to administration*. Little Topsy, he noted, was no longer so little; breasts budding, hips altering the way she walked. (132)

Almost invariably, when science and desire are intermingled in *Benang* Neville and Scat too are represented together, connected discursively to the point that when one is mentioned the other is invoked, and both are inextricably linked to their eugenicist projects.

Scott varies and repeats Neville's words, enacting the simultaneity of the desire for scientific rigour and the desire for the "native": "His [Scat's] interest in genetics. Perhaps it was this sort of detached interest; that of *the scientist, with his trained mind and keen desire ...*" (413). The ellipsis suggests a resistance to closure, leaving any conclusion to the imagination of the reader. Scott's various strategies come together in this passage to compound his conflated representation of Neville and Scat as corrupt subjects, bringing the reader's attention to this

characterisation through the use of italics. Scat observes Topsy as he decides to turn her into his “wife,” his desire inseparable from his eugenicist project and his self-conception as scientific: “She looked exotic, her hair sometimes seemed almost golden, and she spoke and moved with a remarkable elegance given the limited tutoring he had given her. She seemed, my grandfather-as-scientist told himself, almost a new *species*” (133). Scott makes this connection explicit early in *Benang*, stating bluntly: “For Ernest, it [eugenics] was a rationalisation of his desire” (32).

The personal nature of Scat’s and Neville’s project becomes steadily more apparent as Scat’s project moves toward its “conclusion” in Harley. Harley, as narrator, explains:

My mother ... was another of Ern’s domestics. Young, only a few years younger than Tommy. [Her name was] Ellen. Her voice was soft, and—who knows?—perhaps it was she Mr Neville had in mind when he wrote; *the young half-blood maiden is a pleasant, placid, complacent person as a rule, while the quadroon girl is often strikingly attractive with her oftentimes auburn hair, rosy freckled colouring, and good figure, or maybe blue eyes and fair hair.* (399)

Desire is again present, welling up from beneath the surface through phrases such as “strikingly attractive,” “good figure,” and the romantic description “maiden.” Neville and Scat are represented together (Scat uses Ellen for his project as he does his succession of “mixed-race”

domestics) and Neville's words are used to describe Scat's feelings. Scat proves himself throughout the novel to be a prolific sexual abuser, and this abuse extends disturbingly to his grandson. Harley is the narrator of the text, and Scat's treatment of him brings Scat's and Neville's actions in the name of science to the fore. Scat's abuse of Harley is in addition to that of the succession of "half-caste" girls he employs or adopts: "My grandfather was observing me in such a way – *scientific* he would have said; lecherous, say I – that it was impossible for me to feel at ease" (23).

Slater articulates the attraction of ways of thinking such as eugenics: "[t]he language of eugenicist mathematics allows the system of the world to be known in a completely compelling way – as a system of certain truth" ("Most Local" 54). *Benang*, through the continual representation of eugenics through the lens of power, sex, and abuse comprehensively prevents the compelling narrative of eugenics from being mobilised. As well as showing Neville's and Scat's science of choice as corrupt, *Benang* also highlights its inadequacy when confronted by human multiplicity. The failure of a eugenics-based system of classification is shown through Scott's characterisation of Sergeant Hall's quailing in the presence of a group of children: "His calculations faltered. He had to call them all *half-caste*, and ignore the range of hues" (84). The essentially reductive nature of eugenics is made apparent.

The reductive nature of Scat's and Neville's scientific endeavour is also seen in the image of the damaged mirror that returns often in *Benang*. This image can be read as a metaphor for assimilation, but also highlights assimilation's blindness: not its comprehensive surveillance but the surface missing from the mirror, preventing an all-seeing gaze. Successive members of the family use Scat's mirror to examine themselves, utilising the colonial apparatus to survey themselves, as well as being surveyed by it:

Topsy used Ern's mirror, just as Kathleen had. It was patchy, and so their faces were incomplete. There were flecks and spots, and there were pieces of themselves missing ... There were increasing areas of blackness, more pieces missing and making her invisible. (160-61)

Earlier generations of Harley's family also examine their reflections, showing the power of language in the act of representation, influencing the way the characters see themselves: "Jack Chatalong and Kathleen Scat would face their gloomy and distorted reflections. They considered their noses, lips, skin, wondered at the lesser brain capacity – according to what they read – allowed by their skulls" (138). The importance and power of the textual construction of identity is emphasised. Concurrently, *Benang* positions Aboriginal characters as reading subjects: "[Kathleen] and Jack tired of reading old newspapers they'd retrieved from bins, or snatched from the wind" (138). Combined with

the earlier characterisation of Neville and Scat as ungrammatical, such representations become a continual repositioning of stereotypical views of what kinds of people have access to, and control over, language.

The mirror can also be turned to different purposes, reflecting the treatment of colonial archival material in *Benang*. Harley uses Scat's mirror to find connections with the past that his grandfather has tried to erase. He tells the reader: "I looked for ancestors in the mirror" (161). Harley's use of Scat's mirror is akin to *Benang*'s use of Neville's texts and the materials of his colonial administration—examining them differently from how they might be intended, in order to reveal different stories and truths. *Benang*, through its consistent undermining of the project and discourse of Neville and Scat, combined with its complex, sympathetic portrayal of the members of Harley's family, fosters an audience identification with the colonised, over the coloniser. The ways in which *Benang* negotiates the relationship between, and the representation of, Neville and the central Indigenous characters can be read as an articulation of problematic settler identity. Throughout Scott's novel the relationship is utterly personal, with Neville (through Scat) having a lustful, abusive and significant impact on the Aboriginal characters. However, they also make their mark on Scat, taking him with them on their shared journey through the landscape and oral history of their family (350, 379, 446). Towards the end of the novel, Harley is shown re-visiting the country, going to places that he went

with his father and uncles, bringing his own children with him. The connection with nature and family acts to curtail the anti-gravitational “uplifting” impulses instilled by Scat and Neville, so that, he states, “I was still a lightweight, but as I walked hand-in-hand with my young children, I noticed that my footprints in the sand were almost as deep as theirs” (452). Thus, the coloniser / colonised tension is managed through a recognition of the presence of Neville (coloniser), and through an affirmation of community and family (colonised) in opposition to individual assimilation. Harley is walking forward despite the best efforts of Scat and Neville.

Benang’s complex engagement with discourses of history can be seen as embodying Hutcheon’s description of novels that can be classified as “historiographic metafiction”: works that deal with the past with a “narrative voice, wondering about its reader, ... thematizing or allegorizing, in a sense, the act of *énonciation*, the interaction of textual production and reception” (“Historiographic Metafiction” 229). Such a wondering, questioning narrative voice is present throughout *Benang*—a work that is almost utterly concerned with the past and which, in Hutcheon’s words, “presupposes the viewer’s presence and then plays ironically with it” (“Historiographic Metafiction” 229). Scott continually brings the reader’s attention to the constructed nature of the text and the constraints within which it operates. Harley confides in the reader: “When I write like this—of

railways, and fences, and of extensive pages of notes—I give a nod to my grandfather; to his lines and his discipline, to his schemes and his rigour. And I further acknowledge, and nod to, the demands of Historical Fiction” (323). Scott is utterly aware of the self-reflexivity of his work and the restrictions and demands of the genres with which he is working. During an interview in 1995 he expressed a desire to both use and remain free from the conventions of the historical novel: “Although it is an historical novel I don’t want it to remain in the past. I want it to finish in the now. Because it is empowering, affirming. I’m part of Neville’s failure” (“Shouting Back” 21).

The narrator worries about the way his story is turning out, and lets the reader in on this anxiety: “But I anticipate myself. I do not wish this to be a story of me—other than in the healing—but of before me” (10). Harley has a heightened awareness of how his story must look to his readers, agonising over their perceptions: “I hesitate to mention it; in the context of this story it may seem so dreadfully *symbolic*” (24). The anxious, somewhat insecure construction of *Benang*’s narrator works to inspire the trust of the reader, in opposition to the ways in which Neville is represented—characteristically superior and confident—making reader identification difficult. Hutcheon notes the propensity for narrators of historiographic metafiction to be uncomfortable and sceptical about their “ability to know the past with any certainty” (“Pastime” 486). Harley also addresses the reader directly, switching

tone from playful, to admonishing, to conciliatory: "He [Scat] snorted when he read of my ancestors floating from the pages and up, up, up among clouded peaks. I hope for more respect when I share the incident with you" (36). Harley is considerate of the needs of his audience, placating them and thanking them for their patience: "I appreciate your concern, and that you remain with this shifty, snaking narrative. I am grateful; more grateful than you know, believe me" (22). He highlights his vulnerability (and consequently the power of the reader), constructing the exercise of reading as a personal interaction. The novel thus again advances an audience identification with the "mixed-race" narrator rather than the white, obsessive bureaucrat and the abusive grandfather.

However, this relationship is complicated, as at other times Harley addresses the reader in a traditional, formulaic manner which makes clear the constructed nature of the text and his interaction with the audience, self-consciously undermining the relationship built up over the previous pages: "Yes, my grandfather was a shrewd man. A rat-cunning mind, dear reader, mark my words" (43). Scott, through his narrator, confronts the audience with the past directly, implicating them in the performance of past cruelty. As Byrne states, Scott "forces readers to perceive events from a racist perspective—the worldview of early twentieth century [sic] administrators" (111). This confrontational aspect of the text brings the past into contact with the present, opening

it up to further debate. As well as being playfully self-reflexive and cleverly postmodern, *Benang*'s narrator is a powerful figure. Birch also argues for the power inherent in Harley as an opposing figure to Neville, undermining the concrete, sparse narrative of eugenics:

Harley charts the words and images, terminology and categories of race, reconfiguring the labels of "quarter-caste," "half-caste," and "first cross half-blood girls" as a coherent narrative of both the human experience of indigenous people and the psychosis displayed by the colonial protector. ("The First White Man Born" 151)

The cultural work that *Benang*'s representation of Neville performs is the thorough destabilising and subversion of Neville's self-representation. This, combined with the novel's deconstruction of any claim for the scientific credentials of eugenics, makes plain negative and disturbing aspects of Australia's history.

By concurrently reanimating and destabilising Neville and his policies, *Benang* resists a reassuring conception of past administrations as benevolent if misguided. As an overtly self-reflexive text, Scott's *Benang* disrupts Neville's colonial narrative and systems of knowledge in a variety of complex ways. The most powerful of these disruptions come from the appropriation and reconstruction of Neville's published work and archival material, using historiographic metafictional devices to destabilise and undermine dominant narratives of the past. Kim

Scott's *Benang: From the Heart* uses sophisticated literary devices to affect this – the high literary value of his novel stands in contrast to the more popular re-imaginings of A.O. Neville in the many versions of *Rabbit-Proof Fence*.

Chapter 3: **Popular Iterations: A.O. Neville in *Rabbit-Proof Fence***

In 2002 Kenneth Branagh, best known for his popular film adaptations of Shakespeare's plays, became the personification of A.O. Neville in the public imaginary. The likeness of the high-profile, canonical English actor to Neville is somewhat unsettling: Branagh, as he appears in Phillip Noyce's *Rabbit-Proof Fence* is unnervingly similar to Neville's official portrait. This chapter focuses on the most recent and highly publicised manifestation of Neville in the three versions of *Rabbit-Proof Fence*: Doris Pilkington's biographical novel *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence* (1996), Christine Olsen's *Rabbit-Proof Fence: the Screenplay* (2002), based on Pilkington's work, and *Rabbit-Proof Fence*, the feature film directed by Noyce which premiered on 4 February 2002. The chapter is mainly concerned with the film, and uses Pilkington's and Olsen's work to inform that analysis. The film, to a greater extent than the book or the screenplay, has generated a large amount of publicity and contention. Much of the debate centres on the film's representation of Neville and its historical accuracy, therefore this chapter also examines the often heated discussion surrounding the film. The vehemence of the argument, most often conducted through major newspapers, highlights the crucial status of the figure of Neville to those both for and against the film (and the wider context of the Stolen Generations argument in which it is positioned). Neville's presence as an ambiguous and

disturbing figure in *Australia's Coloured Minority* and in Kim Scott's *Benang* is repeated in the versions of *Rabbit-Proof Fence*.

One of the reasons for the attention paid to the film of *Rabbit-Proof Fence* comes from the very public business of selling a feature film, and the media mechanisms in place for that promotion. The film was a notable commercial success, as Felicity Collins and Therese Davis note: "It earned more than AUS\$1.2 million in its first week of screening, reversing the historical lack of interest by Australian audiences in films about Aboriginal people" (133). Quite apart from this, the landscape for any work dealing with the Stolen Generations has changed, as Tony Hughes d'Aeth states:

Between the book (published in 1996) and the film (released in 2001) [sic], the national context for narratives concerning the forcible separation of Aboriginal children from their mothers was paradigmatically altered by the handing down and publishing of *Bringing Them Home* [A Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families].

The publicity surrounding *Rabbit-Proof Fence* intensified when the Australian Film Institute awarded it the prize for best film in 2002.

A.O. Neville in *Rabbit-Proof Fence*: Book, Screenplay and Film.

Although the three versions of the *Rabbit-Proof Fence* story differ slightly, all tell of three “half-caste” girls (sisters Molly and Daisy and their cousin Gracie) from northern Western Australia who are taken from their families and placed in the Moore River Native Settlement under orders from A.O. Neville, as Chief Protector of Aborigines. Their escape from the Settlement and 1600 kilometre journey home along the rabbit-proof fence³ forms the majority of the action in all three versions (although, significantly, it is less central in Pilkington’s work), and Neville is represented in different ways in the story’s changing incarnations.

The book, screenplay, and film begin in different ways. Pilkington’s work opens with depictions of the bush life of the Indigenous characters and their ancestors. In contrast, the film opens with text, which reads: “Western Australia 1931. For 100 years the Aboriginal peoples have resisted the invasion of their lands by white settlers. Now, a special law, the Aborigines Act, controls their lives in every detail.” The second screen of text sets Neville up as the embodiment of this “special” act: “Mr A.O. Neville, the Chief Protector of Aborigines, is the legal guardian of every Aborigine in the State of Western Australia. He has the power ‘to remove any half-caste child’

³ The Number 1 Rabbit-Proof Fence ran from the north to the south of Western Australia (building commenced in 1901), with the intention of insulating the state from the rabbit problem plaguing the other states of Australia. At the time it was the longest fence in the world, but it did not prevent the advance of the rabbit into Western Australia.

from their family, from anywhere in the state.” The film thus begins with Neville, an ominous background to the first images of the film. In a very different beginning to either the book or the film, the screenplay commences with Neville expounding his eugenicist policies to a group of white, primly dressed women, establishing him and his policies as the overt starting point of the story (Olsen 1). This slide show scene, which provides an exposition of Neville’s theories, does not come until later in the film version, where it directly follows the scene in which the three girls are removed from their families, heightening the construction of Neville as the agent of their removal. For Collins and Davis, this scene is also important as it makes explicit “the political, legal and administrative context for the girls’ situation” (139). By beginning with Neville’s theories of race as opposed to Pilkington’s representation of bush life, or even the film’s subtler introduction of Neville through text, followed by images of the Indigenous characters, the screenplay represents him as an all-powerful figure, while the book and the film give the Indigenous characters more agency by depicting the girls’ life of freedom and happiness prior to Neville’s intrusion into their lives. This agency is greatly reinforced through their successful escape and return to their chosen life.

The way that Pilkington’s *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence* most commonly represents Neville is through his official correspondence with police in their role as Local Protectors, at times reproducing letters

or telegrams in their entirety, or showing them pictorially, complete with official stamps and handwriting (51, 53). The book utilises telegrams and letters between Neville and other figures central to the removal and pursuit of Molly, Gracie, and Daisy. By constructing Neville through his official correspondence, Pilkington highlights the official, bureaucratic nature of Neville's administration—showing the institutional character of the policy of child removal. Similarly, in Noyce's film, the majority of the scenes in which Neville appears show him at work in his office. Even when out of his office—when visiting the Moore River Native Settlement for example—he is always shown in his official capacity as Chief Protector. The consistent representation of Neville at work links him inextricably with his role as Chief Protector of Aborigines, and reinforces the construction of Neville as an obsessive, abnormal character. The portrayal of Neville as defined by his work is essential to Neville's synecdochic status: for Neville to stand in for all bureaucrats, he needs to be represented as bureaucratic to the highest degree—necessitating his overdetermined representation as driven, hardworking, and meticulously organised. There is no man behind the Chief Protector. In contrast to these solely bureaucratic representations of Neville, the published screenplay features a scene which is not present in the film or the book, set in Neville's home. The household is bustling with domestic servants, Neville's eight-year-old son Peter and an affectionate Mrs Neville (Olsen 44). This scene was presumably

introduced to show Neville's lack of conscience regarding his removal of children and fracturing of families, and to juxtapose Neville's family values with his treatment of Aboriginal families. This rather unsophisticated point is compounded later in the screenplay (although not in the film or the book), where Neville states in a contrived manner "It's just occurred to me: the little one [Daisy] is the same age as my Peter" (Olsen 68).

The film follows Pilkington's text in its characterisation of Neville as defined by his work. An exchange of correspondence that constructs Neville as constantly concerned with his department's reputation, and simultaneously destabilises Neville's self-representation as benevolent, is featured in the biographical novel. Pilkington cites a letter from the Commissioner of Police which highlights Neville's preoccupation with the reputation of his department:

The Chief Protector of Aborigines has informed the Commissioner of Police that he did not desire any further action in re: half-caste Molly because she has been a costly woman to the Department. Very heavy expenditure was incurred in securing her, and when she decamped a lot of undesirable publicity took place. The Commissioner of Aboriginal Affairs (File No. 345/36). (Pilkington 125)

As Anne Brewster notes, "The decision to abandon efforts to recapture Molly represents a break with the rhetoric of duty-of-care," and reveals

gaps in the representation of Neville as a benevolent figure, a sincere believer in the rectitude of his policy. Pilkington also shows Neville's contradictory response when asked by Arthur T. Hungerford (the Protector of Aborigines for the Jigalong Depot) whether Daisy should be returned to Moore River: "I would like the child to be recovered if no great expense is to be incurred; otherwise the prestige of the Department is likely to suffer" (126). Significantly, in each of these examples Neville is constructed as acting in the interests of the Department, reinforcing the representation of Neville as a governmental, institutional subject. In the closing pages of the book Neville's correspondence is used to construct him as framing the girls' escape through the need for heightened surveillance and reporting, coupled with the removal of children at earlier ages. Pilkington cites Neville:

It's a pity that those youngsters have gone "native" [he's referring to Molly and Daisy], but it cannot be helped. They were attractive children, and ought to have been brought in years ago. This emphasises the necessity for Police Officers to report the presence of half-caste children in the bush. (129, editorial comment in original)

Once again, this fragment of correspondence highlights Neville's institutional subjectivity as well as showing his commitment to his departmental policy.

The differences between the book, screenplay, and film are many, but most critical attention has been given to the divergences between the ways the children were removed in Pilkington's work, and the representation of the removal in the film.⁴ For the purposes of this chapter, however, the most important aspect is the way Neville is represented in this scene. Pilkington has the children riding on the horse of Constable Riggs, the removing officer, before being transferred to a car, spending the night in police cells, and finally travelling south by steamship to Fremantle (44-57), while the film has the Constable manhandle the girls into a car and then transfer them to a train. In the screenplay, the brutality and physicality of the removal scene (which is otherwise similar to that of the film) is emphasised (Olsen 14), while in the film the focus is on Neville as the true remover of the children. The film's removal scene ends with Neville's voice speaking over the image of the girls' family slumped on the ground: "As you know, every Aborigine born in this state comes under my control."

Overall, the screenplay's construction of Neville is much less subtle and nuanced than his representation in the film and the book. Neville is cast firmly as the villain in Olsen's screenplay, effected in a somewhat heavy-handed manner and evident in the scene where

⁴ See Manne, "Casting Off the Shame," Bolt, "Rabbit-Proof Myths," Bolt, "A Shameful Distortion," Bolt, "Separating the Facts from the Friction," Howson and Moore, "A Rabbit-Proof Fence Full of Holes," Noyce, "Rabbit-Proof Defence," Akerman, "Artistic License Spoils this Saga."

Neville visits the Moore River Native Settlement. He is characterised as obsessed with purity and cleanliness, conveyed in a rather clichéd way: “Neville ... carefully wipes his hands with a spotlessly clean, white handkerchief” (Olsen 15). Pilkington’s work, on which the screenplay is based, is, by contrast, marked by an absence of animosity toward Neville, who is represented as a product of his time. Noyce’s film sits between these representations: less condemning than Olsen’s screenplay but with a level of negative characterisation that is not present in the biographical novel. The screenplay constructs the story (and particularly the representation of Neville) more as a popular genre “thriller,” with Neville filling the role of villain through his stereotypical characterisation. The film, by staying closer to the book than the screenplay in regard to this construction, becomes a more complex response to the past, which resists a simple denial or dismissal.

The film’s thesis is evident in a pivotal scene that shows Molly deciding to run away from Moore River. Molly experiences a series of visions, including one in which Neville moves towards her to examine her skin as he has done in the earlier “selection” scene where he gazes at her skin to determine her colouring. Molly repeats the phrase “you make me sick, you make me sick.” Here Neville is constructed as the impetus for the girls’ flight. He is nauseating, something to be feared and from whom to run away. Neville is the motivation for the story of Molly, Gracie, and Daisy—it is his departmental policy that removes

them from their families, and his “sickening” nature that convinces Molly that they must get away. After the girls have escaped from Moore River and are on the run, Pilkington’s work focuses closely on their journey and their survival in the bush, occasionally inserting archival detail to show the movements of the girls’ pursuers. One of these textual intrusions is a short article from the *West Australian* entitled “Missing Native Girls,” which is reproduced in its entirety (102 albeit with introduced errors; here, I reproduce the original):

The Chief Protector of Aborigines (Mr. A.O. Neville) is concerned about three native girls, ranging from eight to 15 years of age, who, a week ago, ran away from the Moore River Native Settlement, Mogumber. They came in from the Nullagine district recently, Mr. Neville said yesterday, and, being very timid, were scared by their new quarters, apparently, and fled in the hope of getting back home. Some people saw them passing New Norcia, when they seemed to be heading north-east. The children would probably keep away from habitations and he would be grateful if any person who saw them would notify him promptly. “We have been searching high and low for the children for a week past,” added Mr. Neville, “and all the trace we found of them was a dead rabbit which they had been trying to eat. We are very anxious that no harm may come to them in the bush.” (“Missing Native Girls” 8)

The inclusion of this article in *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence* is straightforward, used as corroborating evidence of the girls' flight and the knowledge that their pursuers possessed of their whereabouts. The same article is also used in the film, but it is subverted by the way in which it is presented. Noyce's film uses the article to highlight the resistance of the remaining inmates of Moore River to Neville's authority as Chief Protector (and the irony of that title), and to cast Neville as an enemy to all "half-caste" children. The film shows the inmates of the female dormitory at Moore River listening to an older girl reading the article and laughing at the notion that Neville (they chant "Devil, Devil") is worried for the safety of Molly, Gracie, and Daisy.

The complex nature of the character of Neville in Noyce's version of *Rabbit-Proof Fence* is apparent in the varied methods used to influence his representation. The techniques of film processing and the choice of film stock are used to effect the way Neville is presented in the film, as well as more traditional narrative methods. Noyce states that one of the ways in which such effects were employed was the use of a particular processing technique for the sections of film relating to the scenes set in Neville's office so that "the shadows would be deepened, sort of highlighting the stolidness, obsessiveness of the character" ("Director's Commentary"). Adrian Martin highlights other, more overt, filmic techniques employed to aid the representation of Neville as a character

which resists audience identification: “[c]easelessly pinned in the centre of uglifying, ultra-low or high wide-angle compositions, Branagh plays Neville as a stiff, unfeeling creature.” The multifaceted, ambivalent nature of the character is emphasised by Noyce, who states that Branagh was “attracted to the role of Neville because it gave him the chance to play someone full of contradictions” (“Director’s Commentary”). Another of the intricate ways in which Neville’s representation is layered throughout the film is noted by Greg McCarthy, who sees the characterisation evident in the juxtaposition of the likeable, innocent girls and the officious Chief Protector: “The film ... intersperses the journey home with scenes in which the coldly efficient bureaucrat, A.O. Neville (Kenneth Branagh) makes decisions over the lives of all Western Australian Aborigines from his Perth office” (7). It is a combination of all these factors which produces the image of Neville for the viewer, rendering him a complicated figure: with good intentions, although misguided.

This complex construction of Neville results in a character that is generally unsympathetic for audiences. Coupled with the attractive, vibrant, and innocent heroines, this produces an audience identification with the Indigenous characters. This successful and well-marketed film’s Australian audience was predominantly white. Phillipa Hawker states that Noyce made a concerted effort to attract this white, “mainstream” audience by airing television segments about the making

of the movie, quoting Noyce: “[w]e thought of the *Today* show because we knew that one of our major constituencies was going to be Australian women. By being on that show we wanted, I guess, to have its mainstream qualities rub off on *Rabbit-Proof Fence*” (4). There was also, of course, an Aboriginal audience for the film, however it is outside the parameters of this project to examine this response.⁵ This identification is fostered through a number of strategies at work throughout the film. In their critique of *Rabbit-Proof Fence*, Emily Potter and Kay Schaffer emphasise the film’s avoidance of an examination of audience responsibility and guilt. They see the audience identification with the Indigenous characters (as opposed to the perhaps more proper identification with Neville and his colleagues) as problematic: “empathic identification with the victim closes off discussions of responsibility” (Potter and Schaffer). They argue that this empathic identification is produced in part by the use of particular camera moves and effects, especially in the potentially uncomfortable scene where Neville inspects the colour of Molly’s skin, which is filmed at child height from Molly’s point of view: “we see the face and hands of Neville looming into view as he reaches out towards Molly and, pulling her towards him, raises her smock to check the colour of her skin, thereby violating the personal space that is now conflated between

⁵ For one example of an indigenous response to *Rabbit-Proof Fence* see Birch, “This Is a True Story”

Molly and the audience” (Potter and Schaffer).

This identification with the victims of assimilationist government policy as opposed to identification with those implementing that policy is heightened by the casting of an English actor in the role of Neville, as Hughes d’Aeth notes: “the WA Protector of Aborigines [is] played with a distancing Britishness by Kenneth Brannagh [sic].” Neville, according to Pat Jacobs’ biography, arrived in Australia in March 1897 (25). As the film is set in 1931, his accent may have become less English, although speculation is of limited value. The representation of Neville through the casting of Branagh nonetheless places him as less Australian—and quite deliberately distances him from the contemporary (Australian) audience. This is a distance that is quietly compounded as the escapees continue on their journey and receive food and aid from several station workers with typically Australian accents. In the combination of the representation of Neville as English (therefore not white Australian) and the strategies through which the film constructs audience identification with the stolen girls, as opposed to the white settlers doing the stealing, the film privileges empathy over responsibility.

The film enacts this privileging through the various strategies that encourage identification with the Indigenous protagonists. These strategies include the representation of Neville as English, the specific camera moves that enable the viewer to see from the girls’ point of view, and, chiefly, that Neville is defined as denying freedom and self-

determination to Molly, Gracie, and Daisy. This strategic identification is also in operation through the paratextual framing of the film. The subtitle of the “Collector’s Edition” DVD puts the viewer in the place of the runaway girls: “Follow your heart. Follow the fence.” This empathetic framing takes extreme form in the American promotional material, with the slogan “What if the government kidnapped your daughter?” Noyce also draws on empathetic reasoning when explaining his justification for taking on the film, against arguments that it was not his to tell, being an Indigenous story. He states: “I finally decided that as a parent I was equipped to make this story, a story about commonality, the ways in which, to me, we are all the same, not different” (“Director’s Commentary”). The majority of the audience for the film is white, therefore the audience identification with “mixed-race” Aboriginal protagonists who triumph over the clinical British bureaucrat (with the help of a series of kindly, stereotypically Australian, working-class farmers) can be seen as a somewhat overly literal metaphor for reconciliation.

The dual movements that this film undertakes—both the distancing of Neville and the (simultaneous) strategic audience identification with the Indigenous characters—can be seen as one way in which the film works through the dual tension typical to settler subjects in that they are both coloniser and colonised. Neville embodies the figure of the colonising bureaucrat, hence the desire of settler

subject audiences to distance themselves from this character. The indigenising identification of the viewer with the “mixed-race,” attractive, young, vital Aboriginal protagonists and the reconciliatory narrative advanced throughout the film is an attempt to efface any distance between “white” and Indigenous Australians in order to elide any further tension between coloniser and colonised—identifying firmly as colonised. Read in this way, the overly simplified narrative of the film becomes that “mixed-race” Aborigines and “typical” Australians work together to find their way home—using an European construct (the fence)—to an inclusive, reconciled future.

Down the Rabbit-Hole: The Descent into Debate over *Rabbit-Proof Fence*’s Representation of A.O. Neville.

The many interviews, reviews, newspaper articles, documentaries, and other diverse contextual elements that surround the film are crucial to any analysis of the diverse ways that the versions of *Rabbit-Proof Fence* make meaning. Such elements are a more distanced form of paratext that Gerard Genette terms “epitext” (5). Many of these epitexts lose their distance from the text (effectively becoming “peritexts”), with interviews, documentaries, commentary, and newspaper articles appearing as special features on the “Collector’s Edition” of the DVD. For Genette, “the epitext—in contrast to the peritext—consists of a group of discourses whose function is not always basically paratextual

(that is, to present and comment on the text)" (345). This remains the case for the epitexts pressed into peritextual service—many continue to operate as part of the wider debate about the Stolen Generations while simultaneously serving to present the text. In this way, the film self-consciously performs its placement at the centre of heated debate, carefully offering viewers a chance to see a selection of viewpoints through the various newspaper articles available on the CD-ROM component of the DVD. Before examining the debate itself, I survey the original response to the film in order to situate the film in its cultural context.

The majority of the reviews of *Rabbit-Proof Fence* published in Australia echo Noyce's statements about the ways in which his film represents Neville. According to Noyce, everyone that worked on the film "agreed that A.O. Neville was misguided, but that he felt that he was saving the Aboriginal race" (qtd. in Martin). In a review of *Rabbit-Proof Fence* for the *Sunday* program on the Nine Network, Peter Thompson analyses the film's portrayal of Neville: "[s]incerely believing he has a responsibility for their long-term welfare, Neville is totally convinced of his moral and cultural superiority." Thompson contends that the film's strategy of showing Neville and his policies but not damning them is effective: "AO Neville is never condemned in the film for his beliefs, but the unconscious irony of what he says is brutally obvious." In Melbourne's *Sunday Age*, Tom Ryan interprets the complex

representation of Neville in a different way, praising the film for its subtle and measured approach to the character, emphasising that Neville's ideas are those of the period:

In another context ... A.O. Neville (Kenneth Branagh), could have been depicted as a brutal oaf. Here, he might be operating according to the racist and outrageously patronising assumptions of his times, but he's quietly spoken and worn down by his attempts to do the right thing by his charges.

In contrast to the majority of local reviews of the film, international reviewers (particularly those from the United States) tend toward a more straightforward designation of Neville as a traditional villain figure. Neville is clearly cast as the villain in Anne Hornaday's review for *The Washington Post*, despite Noyce's frequent assertions that Neville "genuinely wanted to help the Aborigines" ("Director's Commentary"). Hornaday misses the complexities that others note, stating that Neville is "played with thin-lipped officiousness by Kenneth Branagh. To the Aborigines he is known as Mr. Devil, and it's clear why: he obviously relishes his job of tearing families apart" (12). There are exceptions, however, as the portrayal of Neville is seen as tragic and universal for another American reviewer who emphasises Neville's belief in his own benevolence: "[t]he tragedy, as in all cases of colonial bullying, is that he fully believes in himself as their savior" (Taylor). The complexities and ambiguities of the representation of

Neville are paramount for Ella Taylor, who praises Branagh's performance, in particular his representation of the mass of contradictions that belong to colonial administrators: "Branagh's Neville is the consummate colonial—a wretched marriage of good intentions, a narrow, moralizing intellect and an unacknowledged need to hold sway over others" (Taylor).

Given the very different interpretations of the character of Neville in the film, combined with the contested nature of the colonial past, it is perhaps unsurprising that it is the debate over the representation of Neville that forms the core of contention surrounding the film as a whole. The centrality of his role is noteworthy because the representation of Neville does not appear to be the most emotive or controversial aspect of Noyce's film. Martin notes Neville's vital position: "Where the mistakenly assumed realism of *Rabbit-Proof Fence* has stirred the most heated debate is in its depiction of a crucial real life figure, A.O. Neville." Although all of the central characters in the film are "real life" figures, Neville is identified as the "crucial" character. Hughes d'Aeth neatly summarises the simple and rather repetitive nature of the argument surrounding *Rabbit-Proof Fence*: "the film is a critique of assimilation with Neville as the leading assimilator. The political debate over the film has tended to take it on its own terms and either endorse this critique or refute it, predictably following the contours of the broader debate about the Stolen Generations."

The debate surrounding *Rabbit-Proof Fence*, which in itself is a version of the debate over the Stolen Generations, can be distilled down to anxieties about what Homi Bhabha describes as “the essential question of the representation of the nation as a temporal process” (“DissemiNation” 204). Hegemonic representations posit the history of Australia as an evolutionary process to be celebrated, portrayed as the positive journey that has brought the nation to where it is today. Tony Birch describes this view of history with reference to Prime Minister John Howard, who, according to Birch, “subscribes to a populist-national representation of the past that focuses on celebration and achievement above ‘blemishes’ in order to produce what he has referred to more than once as a ‘relaxed and comfortable’ view of Australian history” (“The First White Man Born” 138). The film brings up a number of historical events, figures, and policies that disrupt a representation of the past that focuses on celebration, not least A.O. Neville. The ways in which Neville is represented in *Rabbit-Proof Fence* work to challenge a relaxed and comfortable view of history by bringing to the fore images and stories of government cruelty and a colonial project rooted in eugenics, although this challenge is somewhat softened through the various distancing and empathetic techniques employed throughout the film. Kim Scott highlights the danger and power inherent in such a conception of history, arguing against

“history that’s about forgetfulness, that genocidal stuff” (“Romana Koval Interview” 48).

The representation of Neville and of the Australian past in *Rabbit-Proof Fence* has been taken up by a number of commentators and public figures, both left and right wing. Commentators such as Robert Manne, Geoffrey Robertson, Andrew Bolt, Keith Windschuttle and Piers Akerman (all participants in the ongoing “history wars”) have weighed in on the value of the film, with particular concern for its representation of Neville. All of these figures are more or less prominent in the debate about the Stolen Generations but, significantly, Neville forms the centre of their arguments here. As active participants in the Stolen Generations debate, a focus on Neville does not arise from any reticence about arguing such a sensitive and emotive issue. I argue that it is Neville’s status as a synecdochic white governmental figure that is of vital importance.

In contrast to the wider debate about the extent or veracity of the Stolen Generations, this particular narrative has a specific white figure at its centre. Concern over the representation of the white administrator is paramount, eclipsing the typical concerns of the debate. The figure of Neville is used by both sides of the discussion as a symbol. Taylor states that: “A.O. Neville ... [is] an extraordinarily powerful icon of Australia’s dishonor, for he showed up in a similar role and with the same name in *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*, Fred Schepisi’s

magnificent 1978 film based on Thomas Keneally's book." Taylor's observation that Neville acts as an icon of "Australia's dishonor" is astute, and implies that those who seek to rehabilitate his reputation are therefore attempting to recast Australia's past as honourable. Geoffrey Bolton also sees Neville as a synecdochic figure, using the preface to Jacobs' *Mister Neville* to argue that "we should not allow Neville the symbol to colour our views of Neville in his own time and society" (13-14). Bolton observes that utilising the figure of Neville as a symbol detracts from an understanding of him as a product of the period in which he operated.

The deployment of Neville as a synecdochic figure and consequent denial of Neville as a product of his time is crucial to the rehabilitation of Australia's past—there is no recognition that there was a time when Neville's views and policies were unremarkable and acceptable, instead his aberrance is emphasised. This denial of a historical context to Neville effectively renders him an a-temporal figure, and allows him to become analogous to present bureaucracy. In his analysis of the temporal strategies of anthropology, Johannes Fabian asks: "what [is it that] they are trying to escape from by employing a given temporal device[?]" (25). Here, the answer appears to be the spectre of a eugenicist past. I suggest that the strategic decoupling of Neville from his historical context and the consequent discursive restoration of the past are dogged by the significantly less deliberate

subsuming of Neville into the present. Further, by simplifying the complex and emotive debate over the Stolen Generations into an accusation or defence of a symbolic figure such as Neville, represented as the architect of the child removal policies, the argument is less complex and easier to manipulate.

This argument about the film's representation of Neville operates outside the expected circles of film criticism and moves from reviews into the public domain. Bhabha's notion of the workings of denial illuminates the political debate about the veracity of *Rabbit-Proof Fence's* representations of the past. Bhabha states that "denial is always a retroactive process; a half acknowledgement of that otherness has left its traumatic mark" ("Interrogating Identity" 88). Newspaper columnist Andrew Bolt vigorously denies the film's claim to be a true story. "I repeat: *Rabbit-Proof Fence* is not a true story. It is instead a distortion of a true story that tells a deep untruth: that thousands of children were stolen from the arms of caring parents simply as an act of genocide" ("Separating the Facts"). Bolt articulates the otherness that has left its traumatic mark—the idea of a past filled with genocide and stolen children, destabilising a conception of a nation with a history worthy of celebration. In another of a series of newspaper articles on the subject, Bolt reacts by countering this destabilisation of a comfortable history, examining the differences between Noyce's film and Pilkington's biographical novel, selectively highlighting supposed discrepancies

between the two to challenge the film's representation of the past and, crucially, of Neville. He juxtaposes "the film" and "the fact" throughout the article to advance his argument that Neville was acting in the best interests of the children:

THE FILM suggests Molly and her cousins were removed from Jigalong because the state's Chief Protector of Aborigines, A.O. Neville, was a genocidal racist who wanted to "breed out the Aborigine." It shows Neville outlining his plan to take mixed-blood children from their families and stop them breeding with full-bloods. THE FACT is the girls were taken after Neville learned they were in danger. (Bolt "Shameful Distortion")

Keith Windschuttle also uses Pilkington's work to refute the truth claims made by the film: "the [removal] scene Noyce created is pure fiction since, according to the book, Molly was taken without a struggle" (*"Rabbit-Proof Fence"* 13). Such is the importance of the film's representation of Neville that defending his reputation forces right-wing commentators such as Bolt and Windschuttle into positions that they would not typically inhabit. Bolt's construction of Pilkington's work as "fact" in order to facilitate his denial of the film's truth claims exemplifies such awkward positions. Apart from the problems that emerge from taking any text as a direct, transparent window to the truth, Bolt's canonisation of Pilkington's work places him in opposition to conservative arguments which question the reliability and partiality

of Aboriginal accounts of history.⁶

Unlike the many reviewers who invariably mention Neville's representation in the film as a finely nuanced one, a "misguided civilizer" who is "[p]ortrayed with great empathy" (Strickland), Bolt situates Neville's characterisation as clearly and absolutely negative – as a "genocidal racist" – presumably to facilitate a vehement negation of this representation. In keeping with Bhabha's notion of denial, in Bolt's attempt to facilitate a complete rebuttal of Neville's negative representation, the very images that would be suppressed are invoked. Birch highlights the absence of such loaded terms in the film itself:

Critics of *Rabbit-Proof Fence* and the portrayal by British actor Kenneth Branagh of Neville as the bureaucratically obsessed "protector" of Aborigines also want a particular memory of Neville saved, rejecting any notion that he was a "racist" (a term that is never used in the film), who wanted to "breed out the Aboriginal race." ("This Is a True Story" 123)

In a similar vein to Bolt and Windschuttle, Peter Howson (Minister for Aboriginal Affairs from 1971 to 1972) and Des Moore assert in the *Australian* that "[t]here is a need ... to examine the grossly misleading assertions regarding Aboriginal policy made in the film" (13), and dedicate the majority of their article to restoring the

⁶ For the most prominent example of such arguments see Windschuttle, *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History, Volume One: Van Diemen's Land 1803-1847*.

representation of Neville from the “insults” to his memory made in *Rabbit-Proof Fence*. To counter the film’s representation, they cite Neville’s submission to the 1934 Moseley Royal Commission and highlight the legislative support for his policies. “Neville acted responsibly,” they state, and end their piece with the assertion that “[t]he film’s casting of Neville as ‘a devil’ in the eyes of the Aboriginal people is the final insult” (Howson and Moore 13). Howson moves from a simple defence of Neville to an active attempt to rehabilitate his reputation, during a story that aired on the current affairs programme the *7.30 Report* in December 2002 (which was reporting the ongoing debate about the film). Howson praises Neville, constructing him as a figure to be celebrated: “I think Neville really was a man in advance of his time and he hasn’t got the tribute that he should have done” (qtd. in O’Donnell). The forceful and repeated denials of Neville’s representation as “racist,” and equally strong assertions of his benevolence and concern, fit with Bhabha’s description of the presence of the traumatic mark of the other in the act of denial. It appears that vehement denial is not enough—it needs to be complemented with equal measures of praise and tribute to the good qualities of the figure in question. Not only are those that impugn Neville wrong, the argument goes, they are misled in the grossest manner.

Prominent figures on both sides of the debate use a discussion of the film (and its representation of Neville) to advance the argument

about broader concerns with history and the Stolen Generations. Robert Manne argues for the historical veracity of *Rabbit-Proof Fence* and, inevitably, of its representation of Neville: “in showing that the architect of the removal policy was the Chief Protector of Aborigines, A.O. Neville, a man driven by the vision of a society cleansed of half-castes, the film offers a clear interpretation of the early phase of child removal in Western Australia” (“Casting off the Shame”). John Hewson, former leader of the Liberal Party, adds his voice in praise of the film, using it as a step to call for an official apology for the Stolen Generations (82). Windschuttle also uses Neville and the film to talk about representations of the past in relation to current political debate, although for the opposite purpose, as reported in *The Northern Territory News*:

Yesterday, addressing a convention of the West Australian Pastoralists and Graziers Association, he mounted a spirited defence of the state’s 1930s chief protector of Aborigines, AO Neville. Mr Windschuttle said Neville was portrayed in the film *Rabbit Proof Fence* as a heartless, calculating bureaucrat but he in fact was the opposite of racist and had properly supported the integration of Aboriginal people into the wider community.

(“Pack Up” 6)

The use of Noyce’s film in this way, as a segue to a wider debate, is not itself particularly remarkable. It is the constant presence of Neville in

these leaps from a critique of the film to a concern with the past that deserves attention. High-profile human rights lawyer Geoffrey Robertson explicitly articulates what many express, the simultaneous naming of the policies as Neville's own, together with the invocation of government support: "Why was Neville's policy never subjected to legal challenge? His power to implement it was unquestionable, thanks to legislation passed by the colonial parliament." Although it is recognised that Neville's policies were enabled by legislation and governmental support, the narrative continues that the policies are Neville's alone. Constructed solely as products of Neville and his project, the policies can then be denounced alongside Neville or rehabilitated along with Neville's reputation. The uncomfortable history of government-sanctioned child removal is rarely mentioned; instead it becomes a personal crusade by a lone figure to either break up families or save neglected children, depending on which side of the reductive debate one is positioned.

The presence of Neville in the three versions of *Rabbit-Proof Fence* highlights the escalating publicity and frequency of his textual iterations. The crucial role of Neville as a synecdochic figure who stands in for white, cruel, bureaucratic administrators is made clear in Neville's central position in the vehement debate surrounding Noyce's *Rabbit-Proof Fence*. That the figure of Neville is subject to such energetic debate highlights contemporary anxieties about the impact of

Australia's colonial past on the present. The cultural work performed by those participating in this debate, regardless of whether they are criticising or defending Neville and his policies, is uniformly to reinforce Neville's synecdochic position.

The versions of *Rabbit-Proof Fence* and the debate surrounding (and extending outwards from) the film use the synecdochic figure of Neville as a way of working through the dual tensions of settler society as "both colonizer and colonized" (Bhabha, "The Other Question" 108). The reductive nature of the debate reinforces Neville's symbolic status, which in turn makes the discursive distancing of Neville from the (left- or right-wing) settler audience more effective: removing identification with Neville works as a disavowal of all white, paternalist, colonial bureaucrats. That the representation of Neville is crucial to both sides of the debate is evident in the discursive contortions performed to enable either side of the argument.

Conclusion: **Too Many A.O. Nevilles**

This thesis has so far examined the ways in which Neville is represented at discrete textual moments. It attempts, as Kay Schaffer does, to “trace the specific and interconnected, unfinished and ongoing contestations of power made possible by representations of the event [or figure]” (*In the Wake of First Contact* xiv). Chapters one and two are explicitly linked through *Benang*’s rewriting and deconstruction of the historical archive, which is examined in the first chapter, while chapters two and three both examine recent cultural productions. Significantly, all of the fictional works examined use, in different ways, the synecdochic figure of Neville (in conjunction with the Indigenous characters central to each work) in order to work through the dual tension present within settler society: of being “both colonizer and colonized” (Bhabha, “The Other Question” 108). Given Neville’s privileged status as a synecdochic colonial figure, his role in these texts’ different takes on the settler subject tension is heightened. Already standing in for white, bureaucratic, colonial administrators, Neville becomes a symbol of the “coloniser” aspect of settler identity. I read the ways in which the texts negotiate the relationship between Neville and the Aboriginal characters as an engagement with constructions of settler identity. The high profile, critically acclaimed nature of works containing representations of Neville suggests the continued relevance

of the figure of Neville to representations of contemporary Australia.

Throughout these fictional representations of Neville, his construction as a synecdochic figure remains constant. Neville operates as a symbol that, depending upon the context, time, and presentation, is used to represent different articulations of colonial discourse. The rabbit-proof fence as a physical structure highlights the (often conflicting) ways in which a figure such as Neville might be read. The fence, which divided Australia from the North to the South coasts, can easily be interpreted as an European construction on Aboriginal land – an imposition, a symbol of territorial dominance. However, it is at the same time a site of cultural exchange, and, like all such sites, it can be read in a number of ways. The central narrative in the *Rabbit-Proof Fence* stories is that of the girls' removal, escape and return home along the fence. Their white fathers are workers on the fence during its construction and maintenance, and it is the fence, combined with their survival skills, which enables their return (as well as, paradoxically, providing the reason for their original removal). Likewise, the film *Rabbit-Proof Fence* (as a case study) can be read as a well-intentioned attempt to advance an empathetic relationship between the film's Indigenous characters and an audience which, according to Collins and Davis (133), has a record of largely ignoring films with Aboriginal subject matter (a notable exception is Charles Chauvel's 1955 film *Jedda*, which was commercially and critically successful at the time of its

release). However, such a reading is compromised by the plethora of distancing and indigenising devices employed throughout.

The continual appearance of Neville in fictional works may be in part due to a lack of critical attention to the aspects of the past in which he is implicated. The crucial issues relating to the past and Neville's administration—widely accepted and implemented theories and policies based on eugenics, resulting in what is now referred to as the Stolen Generations—have been brought into the public sphere, particularly through the *Bringing them Home* report (1997), but do not appear to have been dealt with in a coherent or particularly meaningful way. The lack of an apology from Prime Minister John Howard, the consequent shift of political language from “symbolic” to “practical” reconciliation, and the continuing debates about the validity of Indigenous accounts of history all work to avoid dealing with these crucial issues. Perhaps the increasing frequency and visibility of fictional works containing Neville serve as an attempt to address this vacuum. The vehement and energetic debate that surrounds the most recent public manifestation—the film *Rabbit-Proof Fence*—demonstrates the continuing valency of representations of Neville. That fiction may serve as a catalyst for debate is evident in the variety of (albeit former) political figures contributing to the discussion. The representation of Neville (and consequently of Australia's past, which impacts on a conception of its present) and his policies evidently continues to be a

vital and contested site in terms of the representation of Australia as a whole, as far as such a singular representation is possible.⁷

This project has focused on three fictional and various non-fiction representations of Neville, among a myriad of other possible texts. The sheer multiplicity of textual representations reinforces the importance of examining the figure of Neville as an uncanny expression of enduring (and seemingly escalating) anxieties regarding race, history, nation, authenticity, and the spectre of an oppressive colonial past. Although these other texts are discussed here in passing, they form the broader constellation of representations which give further weight to the close readings of my paradigmatic texts.

Just as *Benang* represents Neville chiefly through its focus on his eugenicist policies, Thomas Keneally's *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* (1972) contains a Reverend H.J. Neville who attempts to indoctrinate the titular Jimmie with his eugenicist ideas: "Mr and Mrs Neville spoke to Jimmie of matters other than tribal. 'If you could ever find a nice girl off a farm to marry, your children would only be quarter-caste then, and your grandchildren one-eighth caste, scarcely black at all'" (7). Mr Neville is represented as the catalyst for Jimmie's series of catastrophic

⁷ Although A.O. Neville is a particularly Western Australian historical figure who had a very specific and continuing impact on the indigenous population of that state, his synecdochic representational qualities enable his mobilisation outside his historical geographical context, becoming representative of colonial bureaucratic administration of Aborigines throughout Australia.

decisions: “He [Jimmie] had very nearly decided that it would be better to have children who were scarcely black at all” (8).

Similarly, Neville’s eugenicist ideas are crucial to his representation in Jack Davis’s *Kullark* (1982). Although not a central character, Neville’s presence is given prominence through the use of a quotation from a meeting of the Western Australian Historical Society at the beginning of Act One (Davis 7). Neville then appears in the second act of the play, again enumerating his eugenicist policies: “A half-caste, who possesses few of the virtues and all of the vices of whites, grows up to be a mischievous and criminal subject. It may appear to be a cruel thing to take an Aboriginal child from its native mother, but it is necessary in some cases to be cruel in order to be kind” (Davis 42). Later in the play Neville denies the request of Thomas Yorlah, one of the main characters, for his family to be exempt from the Aborigines Act and to leave Moore River to pursue a life outside the control of the Department of Native Affairs. Neville is also present in Davis’s 1986 play *No Sugar*, in which he has a more central role than in the previous work. He is represented almost solely bureaucratically, frequently dictating letters to his secretary. He is also constructed as an enthusiastic amateur, delightedly responding to an offer to speak at the Royal Western Australian Historical Society (83).

Pamela Rajkowski’s *Linden Girl: A Story of Outlawed Lives* (1995) is a biographical, historical work that traces the stories of Lallie Matbar, a

“half-caste” Aboriginal woman, and Jack Akbar, an Afghan, chronicling a love story that was prohibited by Neville and the Western Australian government. Neville’s objection to the couple’s marriage is shown to be a product of his attachment to eugenics and his desire for respect within the government bureaucracy (89, 93). Geoff Page also foregrounds Neville’s eugenicist theories, situating them in the context of Neville’s bureaucratic role. Page’s poem “The Afternoon of AO Neville” (2002) emphasises Neville’s dedication to his task—he is aware of the impact of his policies on Indigenous families, but continues with his work—

Those screams at separation are
a Reckitt’s Blue⁸ that brings the whiteness.
He hears them vaguely from the office.
They never quite distract him though. (38)

Neville’s eugenicist policies also feature in Philip McLaren’s *Sweet Water ... Stolen Land* (2001), despite being set in 1870s New South Wales. Neville appears solely by way of a quotation from *Australia’s Coloured Minority* which precedes the start of the novel, although clear similarities can be drawn between Neville and the character of Pastor Karl Maresch.

⁸ According to the Carbolic Soap Co., who continue to make and sell Reckitt’s Blue, it was used “as a whitener, to help delay the yellowing effect [that] you can get when cotton gets older.” See their website <<http://www.carbolicsoap.com/reckitts-blue-p-864.html>>.

In contrast, a number of other works represent Neville in similar ways to Pilkington's *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence*; that is, they show Neville as an administrative subject and a product of his time. *When the Pelican Laughed* (1992), the autobiography of Alice Nannup written with Lauren Marsh and Stephen Kinnane, tells the story of Nannup's life and dealings with the Department of Native Affairs. Nannup was an inmate at the Moore River Native Settlement and later worked as a domestic servant, with one of her places of employment being the Neville household. Throughout the work Neville is presented as the distant administrator who believed that Aborigines and "half-castes" needed only a rudimentary education. Nannup writes that she overheard Neville telling staff at Moore River that "as long as they can write their name and count money ... that's all the education they need" (71). Yet Nannup also represents Neville as a paternalistic employer who routinely enquires after his servant's happiness: "If he came home in a good mood he'd say, 'how's my girl today?' He used to ask me if I was happy and I'd always say I was—even if sometimes I wasn't happy at all" (136).

Similarly, Stephen Kinnane's autobiographical and biographical work *Shadow Lines* (2003) moves from a narrative of his research into his family history and search for his roots into the story of his grandparents: Jessie Argyle, taken from her Aboriginal family at five years of age, and Edward Smith, a young emigrant who moves from

London to Perth. Neville is central to the family's history as he impacts continually on the couple's lives, and is represented as obsessive and meticulous (125), with a sense of superiority: he is "a man who set himself as the earthly judge and controller of Aboriginal lives" (98), and the enemy of the couple's love and (eventual) family. Kinnane is acutely aware of the debate surrounding the representation of Neville and history and uses *Shadow Lines* to offer his comment upon it:

Every Aboriginal Elder I've met who knew Neville disliked the man. They were not wary of him out of a naïve misplacement of blame for their troubles, as some historians seem intent on claiming. These Aboriginal men and women lived the realities of his personal intervention in their lives. (169)

Kinnane emphatically highlights the "personal" nature of Neville's intervention, as opposed to implicating the department as a whole.

Bhabha notes the necessity of rhetorical devices for the maintenance of colonial authority: "Colonial authority requires modes of discrimination ... that disallow a stable unitary assumption of collectivity. The 'part' (which must be the colonialist foreign body) must be representative of the 'whole' (conquered country)" ("Signs Taken For Wonders" 158). Similarly, in the representational process I trace in this thesis, a part of the colonial bureaucracy (Neville) becomes representative of the whole (government structure), which draws attention away from the multiplicity of complex governmental and

bureaucratic power relations with Indigenous populations, thus maintaining the monolithic and uncontested authority of the governmental structure through the synecdochic manoeuvre. This process is illustrated in the “Preamble” to McLaren’s *Sweet Water ... Stolen Land*, which situates the work and explains the mix of fiction and history within it. After informing the reader that the novel moves the Myall Creek massacre forward thirty years, McLaren introduces the figure of Neville:

In 1947, A.O. Neville, Commissioner of Native Affairs in the state of Western Australia offered a written solution to the Aboriginal problem: “Scientific research had revealed that skin pigmentation could be bred out of Aborigines in two or three generations. If I could only have the money and the legislative power to start a selective breeding programme I could, in a matter of sixty to seventy years, solve the ‘Aboriginal problem’ by breeding a race of white Aborigines.” (vi-vii)

The unexplained presence of the work and views of a former Western Australian Commissioner of Native Affairs in the “Preamble” of a novel set in New South Wales brings to light the ways in which Neville is mobilised, even out of context, as a figurehead of all colonial administrations, upon whom postcolonial condemnation can be rightly, if problematically, visited.

Neville's image recurs throughout many different generic forms and media, highlighting the transferable, transcendent nature of his symbolic qualities. The occurrence of representations of Neville in increasingly popular and mainstream texts from the 1990s onwards escalates: rather than becoming less relevant as time passes, the representation of Neville remains an urgent topic. I read the proliferation of representations of Neville in contemporary Australia as a symptom of what Bhabha sees as a common Western need to come to terms with the past: "[t]he Western metropole must confront its postcolonial history ... as an indigenous or native narrative internal to its national identity" ("Introduction" 9). The continuing iteration of Neville serves as a constantly evolving attempt to confront Australia's postcolonial history. Figures similar to Neville which, I argue, also operate in the same way include Captain Cook, George Augustus Robinson and Ned Kelly. Such well known historical figures invite specific, detailed analysis in order to further elucidate their synecdochic function. The continuing iteration of figures for repeated re-tellings can also be viewed through a simplified version of the psychoanalytic notion of the return (not of the repressed, as the proliferation of representations indicates), to be re-told until the issues at stake are "worked through." Significantly, all are white, colonial figures, and each represent differing articulations of colonial administration. That colonial bureaucracy sits uncomfortably with settler Australians is not,

in itself, surprising; however the particular (evolving) anxieties that are projected through such iconic figures shed light on the changing relationship of Australia with its past.

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