

“A WHOLE ALTERNATIVE UNIVERSE”: LANGUAGE AND SPACE IN DAVID MALOUF’S “THE ONLY SPEAKER OF HIS TONGUE”

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Abstract

By displacing Aboriginal communities, interfering with their migratorial routes and sacred sites and forcing them into sedentary practices, European colonialism disrupted the closely-knit links between people, space and language that had characterised life in Australia for 40,000 years prior to the arrival of the British. In linguistic terms that meant the disappearance of hundreds of languages, the devitalising of traditions that had been based mainly on orality and, ultimately, the silencing of thousands of voices. In the short story “The Only Speaker of His Tongue”, David Malouf imagines the encounter between a Nordic lexicographer and the last speaker of a certain Australian language. As the lexicographer reflects about the threat that the loss of a language poses to cultural diversity, he also exposes his particular views on the possibilities of language. The aim of this article is to demonstrate that although the encounter between the scholar and the Aborigine is fictitious and the story is extremely concise, it reaches much beyond its fictional status by, both directly and indirectly, raising issues related to the past and present treatment that Australia has dedicated to its Aboriginal peoples, to the complexities of the field of salvage linguistics and to the functions of language itself.

Keywords: David Malouf; The Only Speaker of His Tongue; Space; Language Death.

David Malouf, born in 1934, in Brisbane, is one of Australia’s most acclaimed contemporary writers. Winner of several literary awards, Malouf’s production is not only prolific, but also a multifaceted assortment that includes novels, short fiction, memoirs, essays, poetry, a play and even opera libretti. The abilities to navigate among fact, fiction, prose and poetry and to “hear” the music of language have characterised his writings and might account for the distinguishing features of his fiction: a sensibility to the historical and moral relevance of facts that focuses on particular moments, rather than on general situations and an ear for the poetry hidden in seemingly banal details that does not, however, preclude the expression of a sharp critical mind. That is very much the case of the short

story “The Only Speaker of His Tongue”. This 2,000 word narrative is one of those literary achievements that successfully allies the aesthetic pleasure of an exquisitely written piece of fiction to a socially relevant and reflection instigating subject matter.

Without becoming prescriptive, the story addresses a theme that remains painful and controversial in Australian society: the threat to Aboriginal cultural diversity. The plot consists of an incursion into the mind of a Nordic ethnolinguist at the much expected moment in which he meets the object of his interest (or rather, obsession): an Aboriginal man who is the only remaining speaker of a certain Australian language. The first-person narrator introduces himself as a famous (although unnamed throughout the narrative)

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lexicographer—a scholar who is “curious and [who has] a passion for the preserving of things” (Malouf “The Only Speaker of His Tongue” 424). At first, the linguist’s gaze is directed at the figure of the Aboriginal roadside labourer, a “flabby, thickset man of fifty-five or sixty, very black, working alongside the others and in no way different from them” (422). Trying to envisage the treasures hidden behind the man’s deceiving ordinariness, the narrator spends his time surveying the Aborigine’s slightest movements, as the man works and even as he squats at break time, rolls up a cigarette or drinks his tea:

Half a century back, when he was a boy, the last of his people were massacred. The language, one of hundreds (why make a fuss?) died with them. Only not quite. For all his lifetime this man has spoken it, if only to himself. The words, the great system of sound and silence (for all languages, even the simplest, are a great and complex system) are locked up now in his heavy skull, behind the folds of the black brow (hence my scholarly interest), in the mouth with its stained teeth and fat, rather pink tongue. It is alive still in the man’s silence, a whole alternative universe, since the world as we know it is in the last resort the words through which we imagine and name it; and when he narrows his eyes and grins and says “Yes, boss, you wanna see me?” it is not breathed out. (423)

The lexicographer’s tone in the excerpt above—his concern for one of hundreds of languages that is “not quite” dead, or “still alive” in the Aboriginal man’s silence—implies urgency and finality. Not by coincidence, these are characteristics associated with the discipline of “salvage linguistics”, the branch of field linguistics concerned with surveying, recording and rescuing dying languages. Salvage linguistics has been described as a “race against time” (Evans 251), aiming at documenting a dying language “as much as possible and as fast as possible” (Thomason 193). Accordingly, each detail in the story, starting with the title, directs the reader’s attention to the only speaker, an almost tragic figure in the narrator’s eyes and the protagonist of an imminent linguistic catastrophe: “Things centre

themselves upon him”, reflects the narrator, as he observes the group of men, “as on the one and only repository of a name they will lose” (425).

Ironically, however, the only speaker does not speak much. And further defeating both the narrator’s and the readers’ expectations, the half a dozen words he actually utters are in English, rather than in the moribund language we become curious to, at the very least, take a glimpse at. No samples of a rare Australian language are produced nor, by the end of the story, is there any indication that the language will be documented, and much less that it will be saved from extinction. What should be a solemn event—a moment of an almost sacred nature for the narrator—never occurs and we are left with the sad feeling of irrevocability described by the linguist David Crystal:

If you are the last speaker of a language, your language—viewed as a tool of communication—is already dead. For a language is really alive only as long as there is someone to speak it to. When you are the only one left, your knowledge of your language is like a repository, or archive, of your people’s spoken linguistic past. If the language has never been written down, or recorded on tape—and there are still many which have not—it is all there is. But, unlike the normal idea of an archive, which continues to exist long after the archivist is dead, the moment the last speaker of an unwritten or unrecorded language dies, the archive disappears forever. When a language dies which has never been recorded in some way, it is as if it has never been. (*Language Death* 2)

The emptiness left by the man’s silence and the narrator’s own feeling of helplessness leave the scholar in a state of frenzy. As the day ends, he finds himself pacing his room up and down, muttering words in his native language – “*rogn*”, “*hake*”, “*krabbe*”, “*kjegle*”...—as if “naming them in the dark [...] kept the loved objects solid and touchable in the light up there, on the top side of the world” (426).

The situation concocted by Malouf, both in its physical dimension and in the mind of the lexicographer, is an occasion for the approximation of opposites—black and white, highbrow and labourer, north and south,

fir forests and shabby-looking trees, snow-peaked mountains and hot December night—suggesting a reinterpretation of what Mary Louise Pratt has termed the “contact zone”. This concept refers to “the space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict” (6). Reluctant to flaunt his knowledge and hegemonic power over the colonial other, Malouf’s lexicographer, far from being coercive, is a well-intentioned (and somewhat quixotic) figure who recognises that he has come “to these shores from far off, out of curiosity, a mere tourist”(423) and who understands and even sympathises with the Aborigine’s uncooperative response to his curiosity. The conflict consists, thus, in the enigmatic—possibly even strategic – silent treatment that the Aborigine imposes on the foreign intellectual, demonstrating that in this post-colonial encounter, power relations are inverted and the colonial subject has the upper hand.

Malouf’s characterisation suggests an attempt to create the situation of “radical inequality” proposed by Pratt, by invoking “the spatial and temporal copresence of subjects previously separated by geographic and historical disjunctures, and whose trajectories now intersect” (7). The lexicographer is not a white Australian, or a foreign researcher picked at random, but a Nordic one, a man who defines himself self-mockingly as “a stooped blond crane [...] with yellow side-whiskers” (“The Only Speaker of His Tongue” 423) and a “scholarly freak from another continent” (424). Although the specific country he comes from is not established for certain, Scandinavia is allegedly “substantially ahead of the rest of Europe in terms of its provision of transfer payments and social services to its citizens, a region that was more egalitarian than the Continent or England, where democracy was a social and economic concept as well as a political one” (Einhorn and Logue x). Australian Aboriginal citizens, on the other hand, are on the opposite side of the social scale, still suffering the consequences of centuries of historical injustices and fighting for legitimacy as well as for land rights. Australia is also

reputedly among the countries with the best life quality in the world—and, yet, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare data reveal that life expectancy is still around ten years lower for Aborigines when compared to Australians in general; other basic social indicators, such as income, employment and education rates are also lower among Aboriginal populations, especially in non-urban environments and remote regions (Austin-Broos 10).

The skilful management of the first person narration allows for a focus on the internal battle between the scholar’s curiosity and genuine scientific anxieties, on the one hand, and the self-consciousness and guilt he feels on account of his privileged social (as well as linguistic) circumstances, on the other. A further cause of awkwardness is the fact that English—the only contact language available—is foreign to both the narrator, who speaks it “out of politeness”, and the Aborigine, who has been left without a choice and for whom English is a way of survival, a “handful of words” he uses to interact with “those who feed, clothe [and] employ him” (424). English is the invaders’ language, the language of the ones who

set all this land under another tongue. For the land too is in another language now. All its capes and valleys have new names; so do its creatures—even the insects that make their own skirling, racketing sound under stones. The first landscape here is dead. It dies in this man’s eyes as his tongue licks the edge of the horizon, before it has quite dried up in his mouth. There is a new one now that others are making. (424)

In the lexicographer’s particular view of language, English lacks the depth and subtlety to express the man’s Aboriginal identity. Although Malouf’s scholar certainly recognises one side of the coin regarding language in post-colonial times—the fact that language is used as an “instrument of cultural control” and is, thus, “a fundamental site of struggle for post-colonial discourse” (Ashcroft et al. *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* 283)—by focusing only on Crystal’s notion that a language with a single speaker is potentially dead, but mostly, on the Aboriginal man’s voluntary silence, the story seems

to disregard the power of a colonised culture to resist hegemony and to re-inscribe itself into the dominant discourse by appropriating the European language (Ashcroft et al. *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* 19). This partiality makes the story especially gloomy.

Silence is, nonetheless, a crucial element for imperialism. The silence of Australia's ancient landscape is echoed both in the Aborigine's wordlessness and in the narrator's embarrassment. Silence has been the standard European response to the inhumane side-effects of colonialism around the world: the decimation of whole native populations and the social, economic and cultural degradation to which the surviving ones have been relegated. In Australia that silence prevailed in official and academic circles until well into the second half of the twentieth century. In 1969 the anthropologist W. E. H. Stanner coined the term "The Great Australian Silence" to refer to white Australia's tendency to avoid discussing the consequences of the British invasion of the continent and of Aboriginal dispossession. Rather than mere "inattention", Stanner classified his peers' reticence as

a structural matter, a view from a window which has been carefully placed to exclude a whole quadrant of the landscape. What may have begun as a simple forgetting of other possible views turned into a habit and over time into something like a cult of forgetfulness practiced on a national scale. We have been able for so long to disremember the Aborigines that we are now hard put to keep them in mind even when we most want to do so. (189)

The "whole quadrant of the landscape" that was "disremembered" is the mass deaths of Aboriginal people caused by their encounter with the Europeans. Although "massacre" is the word that comes to one's mind (as it does to the lexicographer's), brutal direct conflict was only one of the factors that contributed to the Aboriginal catastrophe. The introduction of new microorganisms and the destructive results of dispossession also caused hundreds of thousands of deaths in the first decades following the arrival of the British. The change into sedentary lifestyles made Aborigines even more susceptible to infections such as smallpox and syphilis, and those highly contagious

diseases not only caused immediate deaths, but also seriously affected future demographics, by hindering conception and the survival of progeny (Rowse 317). The figures are appalling: from 750,000 in 1788, the Aboriginal population in Australia plummeted to 31,000 in 1811 (Moses 18). In subsequent decades, what some critics call the "genocidal" intention of British colonisation became more evident and even more shameful and "tongue-tying" for white Australians. After all, how to talk about deeds of heinous cruelty—premeditated human hunting, the poisoning of Aboriginal water supplies (the "classical" example is Tasmania, where, in 1876, Aborigines were considered extinct) and government policies that, as late as the 1970s, were still removing half-caste Aboriginal children from their families (the so-called "stolen generation") and sending them to missions and orphanages with the aim of "whitening" the population—without offering the counterpart of immediate reparation?

Malouf's narrator's sarcastic remark about the disappearance of one more Aboriginal language—"why make a fuss?"—implies that the disregard for language preservation in Australia is an ongoing trend. The metaphorical "Great Australian Silence" can, therefore, also be regarded as the literal silencing of language variety and Aboriginal expression in general. As could be expected, depopulation was the primary cause of the disappearance of Aboriginal languages. However, from 1895 on, there has been an Aboriginal population recovery (Rowse 321), with Aboriginal people's gradual adaptation to Western lifestyles and the laborious conquering of political empowerment and a better status in Australian society, so much so that the 2011 Australian Bureau of Statistics census identified 548,370 people as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.¹ Nevertheless, the balancing of Aboriginal demographics has not translated into language preservation. In fact, in spite of the more favourable demographics, the number of languages spoken in Australia has remained on a steady decrease since the European arrival.

Aborigines have lived in Australia for 40,000 years. Linguists and historians cannot agree on the original number of languages spoken at the time of Captain Cook's arrival, but a range from 230 to 300

is estimated by R. M. W. Dixon (5). The continental extension of the land meant languages that were very different from one another, and, yet, that could present shared features due to the frequent migratorial and bartering contact between the nations. Furthermore, Mudrooroo observes that the Aboriginal exogamous marriage system and the different nations' shared cultural manifestations required that most Aborigines possessed bilingual or even multi-lingual skills (98). However, a continuous process of language death has meant that, in the twenty-first century, "[n]o more than twenty are currently being learnt by children. The remainder have just middle-aged or old speakers; each decade a few more of these languages cease to be spoken or remembered" (Dixon 2).

In such a scenario, linguistic research has always been a challenging task. While nineteenth-century authorities and colonisers did not take great pains to learn the local variants apart from a few lexical items and stock expressions to facilitate negotiations with the "natives", the first recorded samples of Aboriginal language were, according to Dixon, mostly composed of fragments collected in different geographical areas and/or at mismatched time-ranges. Grammar and lexicons by professional linguists started to be compiled in the 1960s but comprehended about ninety-five languages only (Dixon 1-2). The study of Aboriginal narratives is no easier task. Before the twentieth century, as Penny Van Toorn argues, the European belief in the superiority of literate societies relegated Aboriginal oral literature to the status of primitive myth. When non-Aborigines did demonstrate an interest in Aboriginal narratives, they provided translations into English alphabetical writing, often misrepresenting their original form and intent (19-22). The school system and education policies have also done great disservice to Aboriginal linguistic diversity along Australian history, such as the infamous nineteenth- and early twentieth-century interdictions on the use of Aboriginal languages in classrooms and more recent budget cuts on bilingual education, even in areas with large concentration of Aboriginal population (Crystal *Language Death* 102).

These circumstances do not allow for overconfidence in the field of Australian ethnolinguistics

and Malouf makes sure that his narrator can experience that. Frustration is the result of the narrator's own self-consciousness as much as the Aborigine's silence: "I would like him to speak a word or two in his own tongue"— muses the narrator, as he attempts to mingle with the road workers when they take a break—"but the desire is frivolous, I am afraid to ask" (424). The unease he feels (as well as his own silence) reflects, first of all, the real-life and much discussed ethical dilemma of the scientist dealing with human subjects. On the one hand is the altruistic urge for the sharing of knowledge and, in this particular case, a sincere concern for the preservation of the last vestiges of a human manifestation before it disappears for good (as Malouf's narrator's actual intentions seem to be). After all, in spite of the grim atmosphere and the sense of finality that surround the work of a salvage linguist, it does have its chances of success. There have been instances, as Nicholas Evans points out, in which the interaction between the researcher and the last speaker of a language, who has nearly lost the ability to use it from lack of interlocution, has actually enabled the speaker to regain enough fluency so that the language could be documented (262). Crystal also reports cases of languages that have been saved from extinction and even "resurrected" after being provided with sufficient financial and/or political support ("Revitalizing Languages" 19).

On the opposite side of the ethical scale, however, lies the constant risk of the observer impinging on the free will and self-determination of the informant, constraining him/her to comply with the researcher's request for the supposed "greater good of science" (not to mention for the advancement of the scholar's own career and reputation or other vested interests). As for the specific field of salvage linguistics, several other constraints can interfere in the work of the researcher, and, although the reasons for the Aborigine's silence are not specified along the story, one or more of those assumption can be implied in Malouf's narrator's perception that his "desire is frivolous". Evans lists, among the factors that might pose difficulties for the relationship between the ethnolinguist and the individual being observed, the speaker's personality

(that could vary, for instance, from shy to combative, hopeless or suspicious), the feeling of pointlessness the last speaker might have in producing language that nobody will understand, the speaker's discomfort to establish rapport with someone who does not belong to the community (as well as the amount of time required to overcome this problem), interdicts posed by hierarchical rules and kinship practices determining who is allowed to receive certain linguistic knowledge and matters of territoriality, since language, in Aboriginal societies, seems to be directly linked to place (262-266).

This last aspect is especially relevant to the story, as the narrator-denied access to the Aborigine's inner world and standing in the heat and dryness of the Australian interior—resorts to invoking, more than the memory, the very perception of "the forests, lakes, great-snow peaks" (423) of his own homeland. For him, places, as far as human communities are concerned, are mostly kept alive "in our mouths" and manifest themselves in subtleties such as "the odd names of our villages", "the pet-names we give to pigs or cows", "the nonsense rhymes in which so much simple wisdom is contained" (423). In that aspect, the lexicographer becomes a mouthpiece to the author himself, as Malouf is well-known for repeatedly addressing the theme "language" in several guises along his career. In *An Imaginary Life*, for instance, Malouf's 1978 fictional reconstruction of the exile of Ovid to the outskirts of the Roman Empire, the cruellest punishment that could be imposed on the Roman poet is the deprivation of his first tongue. When coming in contact with a local spice, Ovid learns that it is called "korschka". Tasting a new flavour and learning a new, "barbarous" word, however, cannot, initially, be a pleasurable experience to him, and the episode is a frustrating reminder of his linguistic dispossession:

In isolation, and without the hundred other herbs and spices that might have gone with it in our Roman cookery, it brought no shock of recognition to my palate and no name to my mind. So I know the word for this seed now, and its taste, and its shape and color, but cannot translate it back into my own experience.

Must it all be like this from now on? Will I have to learn everything all over again like a child? Discovering the world as a small child does, through the senses, but with all the things deprived of the special magic of their names in my own tongue? (14)

Remembering Babylon, first published in 1993, again addresses the problem of language and exile. The setting is now colonial Australia, where the life of a small settlers' community in outback Queensland is deeply disturbed by the appearance of Gemmy, who, as a boy sixteen years before, had been thrown out of a ship, being subsequently taken on by an Aboriginal community. Like Ovid among the "barbarians", Gemmy hangs on to fragments of his first language in an attempt to safeguard what he can from his European identity:

He was accepted by the tribe but guardedly; in the droll, half-apprehensive way that was proper to an in-between creature. No woman, for example would have to do with him, and there were many objects in the camp that he was forbidden to touch. [...] When he stretched out in his place by the camp fire and his eyes and hands had nothing to engage them, the images that came, even if he could not grasp them, were as real as the fat in his mouth, or the familiar, distinctive odour of those who were starched beside him. "Boots" the darkness whispered—he caught only the breath of the word—and there they were: objects that made no sense here, that he saw propped up in front of a barred grate with flame in every crack of their leather, the tongues loose, the laces trailing [...]. (28)

As for Malouf's statements about language in non-fictional texts, one of the most notorious examples is in his 2003 essay "Made in England", in which he affirms that a language, is "a most complete and perfect creation" and something the speaker "can come home to" (43). Ultimately, a language can become

a machine for thinking; for feeling; and what can be felt and thought in one language—the sensibility it embodies, the range of phenomena it can take in, the activities of mind as well as

the objects and sensations it can deal with—is different, both in quality and kind, from one language to the next.[...] A language is the history and experience of the men and women who, in their complex dealings with the world, made it; but it is itself one of the makers of that history. (44)

In the perception of Malouf’s protagonists Ovid, Gemmy and the Nordic lexicographer (as well as in his own personal opinion), through this complex reciprocity—the power to represent reality while, at the same time, creating it—language is able to connect generations across time and produce spatial identity. The lexicographer even ascribes a “holy” meaning to language:

All this is a mystery. It is a mystery of the deep past, but also of now. We recapture on our tongue, when we first grasp the sound and make it, the same word in the mouths of our long dead father, whose blood we move in and whose blood still moves in us. Language *is* that blood. It is the sun taken up where it shares out heat and light to the surface of each thing and made whole, hot, round again. *Solen*, we say, and the sun stamps once on the plain and pushes up in its great hot body, trailing streams of breath. (423)

Again, the presence of the “contact zone” is important to the demonstration of Malouf’s thesis. The focus on the European language rather than on the Aboriginal one spares Malouf the danger of attempting to “exotify” an Aboriginal culture: for him all languages seem to have the “holy” or “mysterious” power of creating an idiosyncratic universe.

While the construction of identity must, as both Malouf and his narrator remind us, necessarily go through language in all cultures, in the Aboriginal cosmovision time, place and language are ontologically linked and indissoluble through the seminal concept of the “Dreamtime”. This is the main principle that guides Aborigines and underlies their practices (Mudrooroo 50-51), a philosophical model that challenges the Western practice of separating reality into sections and remains mostly a “mystery” to us, to borrow the narrator’s expression. Judith Wright defines the

Dreamtime as a kind of “spacetime”, an “earth-sky-water-tree-spirit-human complex”, in which

every part of the country [Aboriginal peoples] occupied, every mark and feature, was numinous with meaning. The spirit ancestors had made the country itself, in their travels, and fused each part of it into the “Dreamtime”—a continuum of past, present and future—that was also the unchangeable Law by which the Aborigines lived. The spirits remained in the land, passing on their essence through the births and rebirths of Aborigines themselves, and still present in the telling of their stories. (31-32)

Language, as the main medium for tradition, is part of that continuum. One or more languages, Mudrooroo explains, was given to each community concomitantly with its territory by the ancestors themselves at the beginning of time (ix). Linguistic analysis of Aboriginal narratives corroborates that assertion. Alan Rumsey, examining the interrelationships between land, language and people in Aboriginal cultures, comes to the conclusion that Western notions of nationality—which focus mainly on a certain group of people (the tribe) who both inhabits a territory and speaks a language, and is thus, subject to change (e.g. in case of conquest)—cannot be applied to Aboriginal communities. Aboriginal narratives usually represent languages being “planted” directly into the land by the Dreamtime creators, at the same time that sacred sites were established and named. Languages and other cultural manifestations are thus, connected to the land even before the appearance of people, who become their guardians and propagators (199-200).

Aboriginal history seems to work according to similar principles. Chris Healy analyses three accounts of Captain Cook’s arrival from Aboriginal perspectives, and realises that, according to the Aboriginal historical sensibility, tradition, rather than source materials or authorship, is the focal point. The teller is, at once, “source, document and validation”, and authenticity lies in the act of telling, the performance itself, as well as on the long line of “custodians” who preserve historical memory/veracity. Aboriginal history, Healy concludes,

is linked to place, rather than time. Whereas Europeans are in the habit of ordering events in time, Aboriginal history is equally precise in ordering names to places. This convention is crucial in terms of codifying, positioning and orienting the dialogue. In this case, not only do we hear history through place, but the place of the history establishes its authority because place and its meaning is [sic] continuous. [...] The time of the event returns with the time of the telling because the place is always there. These are histories without a linear notion of time, histories in which space is deeply historical. (515)

By displacing Aboriginal communities, interfering with their sacred sites and migratorial routes and forcing them into a sedentary lifestyle, European colonialism disrupted such primordial links. In linguistic terms that meant the death of hundreds of languages, the weakening or degradation of traditions that had been based mainly on orality and the silencing of thousands of voices. The only speaker

holds [...] on a loose thread, the whole circle of shabby-looking trees, the bushes with their hidden life, the infinitesimal coming and going among grassroots or on ant-trails between stones, the minds of small native creatures that come creeping to the edge of the scene and look in at us from their other lives. (425)

These are the sombre undertones that Malouf brings to his story and that, in his particular views on the function of language, also imply the cataclysmic destruction of whole universes.

If close correspondence between form and content can be deemed a valid way of ascribing literary merit, with "The Only Speaker of His Tongue" Malouf has produced a remarkable example of literature. A combination of ingenious details—the story's conciseness, a first-person narrative focus, the narrator's inquisitiveness and uncertainty in tone, the Aborigine's power-reversal tactic through silence, the contrasts in characterisation, a poetic, yet ironic style and an anti-climax—contributes to the construction of diverse and subtle layers of meaning, further implying that language and place are part of a continuum and

form the basis for diverse traditions. Significantly, those elements provide the story with a long reach beyond the limits of the fictional text, pointing—both directly and indirectly—to a number of aspects of the past and present of Australia's treatment of Aboriginal peoples, to the peculiarities of the discipline of salvage linguistics and, finally, to considerations on the author's views on the functions of language itself.

Notes

1. Rowse points out the difficulties in producing comparative statistics in this field, as, apart from the reliability of the historical data available, there have been changes in the definition of "Aborigine" along the centuries (e.g. interpretations of the terms "full blood" and "half-caste", the willingness to identify oneself as Aborigine and so on), as well as changes in enumeration and estimation methodologies (314-316).

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