

“All We Are Saying Is—Give Peace a Chance”: *The Vietnam War Protest Movement in Australian Women’s Fictions* by Janine Burke, Patricia Cornelius, Nuri Maas, and Wendy Scarfe

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Abstract: Nearly fifty years ago, the Australian government sent thirty military advisers to South Vietnam, thereby initiating a commitment to a war which was to last for over a decade. Altogether, nearly 47,000 Australians, including 17,500 national servicemen served in Vietnam; 500 died and 2500 were wounded. Almost as disturbing as the results of the battlefield were the shockwaves that reverberated throughout Australian society, for the war years turned out to be one of the most turbulent periods in the nation’s history. The events of these tumultuous years are examined in five little-known Australian women’s fictions—Nuri Maas’s 1971 *As Much a Right to Live*, Janine Burke’s 1984 *Speaking*, Wendy Scarfe’s 1984 *Neither Here Nor There* and her 1988 *Laura, My Alter Ego: A Novel of Love, Loyalty and Conscience*, and Patricia Cornelius’s 2002 *My Sister Jill*. Together these texts chronicle the politicization of Australian youth, recount the kinds of overt challenges to the traditional standards of masculinity which had prevailed in Australian society since its inception, and document the emergence of the second-wave feminist movement.

Keywords: Vietnam War, conscription, draft resisters, masculinities, second-wave feminist movement

Nearly fifty years ago, the Australian government sent thirty military advisors to South Vietnam, thereby initiating a commitment to a war—Australia’s longest—which was to last for over a decade. Although Greg Langley observes that Australia’s contingents were small compared to those from Thailand, South Korea, and the United States, altogether nearly 47,000 Australians, including 17,500 national servicemen, served in Vietnam, and the “toll of 496 dead and at least 2500 wounded or otherwise scarred was tragic” (x). Almost as disturbing as the results of the battlefield were the shockwaves that reverberated throughout Australian society, for the war years turned out to be one of “the most turbulent periods in the nation’s history” (x). While Langley acknowledges that changes in Australian society were occurring prior to the war—“labor and immigration patterns, science, the media, international travel and education, were all being transformed, and a growing affluence and consumerism posed a challenge to old ways”—

at the same time, he stresses that Australia was “a conservative, inward-looking country whose attitudes had been shaped by years of depression, conflict, and the Cold War, and characterized by a rabid anti-communism and an almost pathological fear of Asia” (x). Anne-Marie Jordens further asserts that Australians had grown accustomed to placing their confidence in the authority of the federal government, so when Prime Minister Menzies announced in November 1964, without any debate, that he was requiring conscripts to serve overseas (the first troops left for Vietnam in 1965), he had the support of the majority of the population (64). Eventually, however, the Vietnam War became the major catalyst for a re-thinking of the whole of Australian culture and society, as the Tet Offensive, the My Lai massacre, the Kent State riots, and the increasing numbers of deaths and casualties, convinced many Australians they were engaged in a dishonourable and unwinnable war. This combination of factors—which also included many Australians’ discomfort with what they perceived as an increasing subservience to the U.S. (Curthoys 144)—led many to feel their country was in the wrong, and hence “the 1960s and early 1970s became an era of demonstrations, strikes, and confrontations,” as public support for the war began rapidly to erode, and the “Australian way of life” challenged as “never before” (Langley x).

The events of these tumultuous years are examined in five little-known Australian women’s fictions—Nuri Maas’s 1971 *As Much a Right to Live*, Janine Burke’s 1984 *Speaking*, Wendy Scarfe’s 1984 *Neither Here Nor There* and her 1988 *Laura, My Alter Ego: A Novel of Love, Loyalty and Conscience*, and Patricia Cornelius’s 2002 *My Sister Jill*. To my knowledge, these are the only women’s fictions to offer sustained examinations of the Vietnam War protest movement in Australia,¹ to demonstrate the ways in which the family unit became a home front war zone where the war against the war played out through verbal, emotional, and physical violence, and thus to narrate the kinds of stories that rarely appear in history books. Together these texts chronicle what Ann Curthoys has referred to as “the politicization, even radicalization of Australian youth” (138); recount the kinds of overt challenges to the traditional standards of masculinity which had prevailed in Australian society since its inception; and document the emergence of the second-wave feminist movement.

Although Peter Cochrane argues that the “dissent and protest of the sixties was not simply a youth rebellion, as is often suggested” (168), in these novels, it is primarily the “Vietnam generation”—those who grew up during 1965-71, when conscription for Vietnam was in full force—who express the most bitter resentment towards the government and who most strenuously agitate for social change. These “post-war baby boomers,” Cochrane asserts, were an “unusually large cohort” who, as a result of the rapid growth of the university system, were staying in school longer and “studying new subjects such as sociology” or discovering “new challenges in old subjects such as the rise of left-wing Keynesianism in economics” (169). Because this “period of extended adolescence and education ... provide[d] the space for questions for identity and meaning to arise,” these students were “possibly the most energetic, idealistic and visible political force of the era” (169). Hence the government’s prosecution of the war “seemed alien” to the “romanticism and idealism” of youth culture (174).

Cochrane's description of these young rebels fits Maas's Glen Rimshaw in *As Much a Right to Live* perfectly. Born in 1950, Glen is a product of a new system of secondary education designed to raise standards which require him to spend an extra year in his Sydney high school. Maas's narrator asserts that the extended stay resulted in the crop of university entrants (of which Glen is one) being "much quieter," "more serious minded," more "mature" than their predecessors (318), and his mother Elaine suggests Glen is a "determined and individual thinker" (207). Glen is also idealistic—his father Clyde claims Glen wants "to build a utopian world" (275)—and quixotic: a "die-hard, traditional romantic" (312), says his father, and a lookalike of the romantic poet Shelley, says his mother (314). But Glen is also liberal-minded and responsive to others' troubles; during high school, he rescues Larnie, the orphaned daughter of a Jewish poet whose parents died in a rail disaster, from a cruel aunt by bringing her home and then marrying her while both are at university. Glen comes of age when Prime Minister Menzies (who first took office in 1949) commits the first troops to Vietnam, and a rebellious Arts-Law student at Sydney University when required to register for National Service. He does so, but reluctantly, because he believes, as do the other well-read and politically astute young radicals in these texts, that his country is in the wrong. Like Glen, Cornelius's Melbourne University students blame the nation's problems on a prime minister who has not only stayed in office too long, but is also a "war-mongering bastard," and the "worst Prime Minister the country has ever had" (143).

Conscription is the central issue which serves to politicize these members of the fictional "Vietnam generation." One is Scarfe's Jonathon Bourke, a brilliant chemistry and physics student at the University of Melbourne who, distracted by studying for exams, registers, without thinking, for National Service. But after reading the history of Vietnam and its political situation—and in spite of the fact that his eyesight is so poor he would never be conscripted—he applies for exemption because he concludes "there is no evidence that Australia as a nation is threatened by the Vietnam conflict and therefore no reason to conscript young men to fight there" (*Laura* 70). He insists the government has no right to abrogate his right to moral choice, particularly since the system is so "irrational" (64). The method of selection, which he appropriately calls "killing by lottery," forces young men to kill "upon a pure chance happening of marbles being picked out of a barrel" (*Laura* 64). Furthermore, as he points out, if he kills under civil law, he will be sentenced to life in prison, but if he kills in wartime, he does so with impunity. Ultimately, although he is not a pacifist, Jonathon decides that he has a moral obligation to resist fighting and killing in Vietnam and to resist those who would force him to do so (75).²

Young men like Jonathon who refused to comply with the National Service Act were considered either liars or cowards and hence routinely subjected to a series of protracted court cases and fines. Jonathon makes three court appearances, all of which he loses because he is bamboozled by magistrates whose cunning questions prevent him from explaining himself thoroughly. Scarfe's central character Richard McGill, a family friend present at these court appearances, is shocked by the gross unfairness of the proceedings, which treat resisters worse than any criminal, for they are privy to "no jury, no defence, just gaol" (*Laura* 127). After losing his first court case, Jonathon forsakes his studies and becomes an "artful dodger," reduced to playing a game of cat

and mouse with the authorities who conduct early morning raids at universities, at houses or private homes suspected of sheltering conscientious objectors and draft dodgers, and then arrest them. Richard observes that by taking a stand on the right to freedom of opinion, Jonathon has ironically deprived himself of any free will at all. Totally dependent upon others, he is no longer able to sustain his “pride and courage” which eventually turn into “self-doubt and a remorseless disintegration of belief in the morality of his own actions, in the worth of such morality and indeed in any morality at all” (*Laura* 127). At the end of the novel, and despite his fear of being incarcerated, Jonathon has been caught, arrested, and sentenced to two years in prison for non-compliance.³

Similarly, Maas's Glen and his friend Mike refuse to play a part in any organization whose purpose is killing. Mike, a medical student who respects the sanctity of human life, registers for National Service, but purposefully includes with the papers a “hostile” letter which asserts that a democratic government should not force him or anyone else to “go against his will or conscience” to fight in a war which is not only “immoral, but obsolete and a form of lunacy” (348-49), and then challenges the government to conscript him. In reply, the government informs him that if he refuses to be called up after graduating from medical school, he will go to prison for two years. While Mike labels the government's actions “fascist,” Glen argues that any system of government which does not allow for “freedom of opinion and of conscience” is not a democracy, but a “totalitarian” regime that “brainwash[es] a fair proportion of its youth into believing that they're doing a noble service by giving their lives to defend it” (401).

Like other members of the “Vietnam generation,” Glen is opposed to conscription because he is convinced the Australian government is merely toadying up to the U.S. He accuses Prime Minister Harold Holt of trebling the commitment of fighting forces to Vietnam in order to “win the heart of the President from Texas” (315), refers to the Australian government as “corrupt, war-addicted ... American boot-lick[ers]” (411), and refutes as folly the domino theory his father upholds as a reason to remain an American ally. Cornelius's Jill Wheatley in *My Sister Jill* has similar objections: she regards the presence of Australian and American troops in Vietnam as “unlawful,” and enthusiastically swells the ranks of those who protest against the visit of Prime Minister Lyndon Johnson in 1966, whom Holt invited to tour the eastern states. When her twin brothers are conscripted, she tells them they should refuse to fight because they will be nothing but “cannon fodder” for the Americans. Johnson has not come Down Under, she asserts, to “enjoy our beaches or our windswept plains,” but because he needs Australia to send young men to fight in Vietnam, and “Nobody else is stupid enough to help him. Nobody else wants to join forces with a country that has started an illegal war” (149).

These young resisters are also cynical about the Americans' claim that they are “freedom-fighters” bringing democracy to the world. Scarfe's Jonathon argues that the Vietnamese want to run their country themselves, much as Australians want to run theirs, “without being pawns in the colonial strategy of the French or the defense strategy of the Americas” (*Laura* 65), and Cornelius's Jill claims that if the Vietnamese want to live under communism (which they did not), they should have the right to do so. She also claims the Americans have no intention of

helping the Vietnamese: “they’re there because communism scares the shit out of them,” and “because communism is about equality and capitalism is about how the rich have it all and everyone else is shit” (170). Maas’s narrator also argues that although the Vietnamese themselves never enter into the discussion, she believes they simply want to form “one country” (445), and argues that the Americans operate under a hidden agenda: they want to ensure that the “tungsten-rich lands of Vietnam [will] be governed in a manner favourable to their interests there” (345). Maas’ Glen argues, too, that Australians should abide by the wishes of the Vietnamese, who do not want Americans in their country because they have merely set up a “puppet government” to satisfy their own “corrupt ends,” and have left in their wake nothing but devastation: “burnt villages and massacres and defoliation and napalm” (416). Glen is outraged that Americans have yet again employed deadly force against innocent people—he points out that “the destruction of Hiroshima was less than a two-hundredth part of what’s already happened in Vietnam” (350)—and he is revolted by Americans’ hypocrisy: at the same time as they are withdrawing ground troops from Vietnam, they are “stepping up aerial bombardments” (432) on Laos and Cambodia. Furthermore, Glen asserts that the twenty-to-thirty billion dollars the US spends on genocide should go towards building schools, hospitals, nurseries in America and towards solving their own racial, economic, and social problems (416). He also protests that democratic ideals are being undermined in Australia because the young do not have the right to reject acts that are cruel, immoral, and “downright un-Christian” (313), such as attacking a Third World nation full of poor people.

The youthful protestors in these fictions find themselves not only railing against the dictates and actions of corrupt political governments and institutions, but also fighting hostile home front enemies—their fathers—whose values they do not share. During the Vietnam War, Cochrane remarks, the generation gap became “unusually wide” (169), and in these fictions many young people find their fathers have turned their kitchens and lounge rooms into battlefields. Cornelius’s Christine claims she and her five siblings are only free to laugh, tell jokes, and talk when their father is “missing”; but when Jack, a mean drunk, returns from the pub (and it is always from the pub), the house becomes a war zone where fighting, yelling, ugly outbursts and threats of attack prevail. Jack’s daughters refer to him as “a ticking time-bomb” (83) and a “savage pit-bull” (22), and regard him as such a destructive force in their lives that they occasionally play a macabre game where they devise ways to kill him.⁴

Conscription once again proves divisive because fathers support the policy; they are, as Scarfe’s mother/wife Laura says disdainfully, “middle-aged or old m[e]n quite safe in [their] armchairs by the fire at night and quite ready to send the young to fight and die” (*Laura* 90). Cornelius’s Jack Wheatley, the only one of these fathers to have served in World War Two,⁵ is in fact eager to send the young to fight and die; he claims that conscription “is the best thing that’s happened to the country for years” and declares that “young men today ... need direction, training.... If you’re called up, you’re called up. There’s nothing more to say about it” (133). But Jack has plenty more to say about it: “Conscientious objectors! Cowards, Communists, should be shot” (134). He is therefore delighted when his twins, Michael and Matthew, are conscripted, even though they are physically slight and temperamentally unsuited for combat, and revels in the

congratulations (and beer) his RSL mates—who were, as Jordens asserts, strong advocates of conscription (64)—bestow upon him. Heartlessly, Jack shuns Matthew when he fails the medical. Similarly, Maas's Clyde Rimshaw lacks any understanding of his son's gentle nature: he encourages Glen to register for National Service because “a couple of years of hard physical training” are “exactly what he needs” (172). Scarfe's Kelvin Bourke declares that those who do not want to fight are either “cowards” (*Laura* 90) or “stupid young fools” who will “not stop the war” (*Laura* 89), and because “father knows best” is the rule in his household, Jonathon is forced to leave home.

Other skirmishes arise because the young want to change the world, whereas the old merely wish to safeguard it. Glen argues that young people do not want to accept “things as they are,” but to “to make the world a better place for everyone”; yet whenever they identify societal ills, their fathers tell them to stop “disturbing people” who simply “want to go on sleeping” (205), a recurring comment in several of these texts. According to Cochrane, many of these white-collar, middle-class, and affluent fathers (like Clyde and Kelvin) were content with their lives and hence “fearful of protest and change” (168); many others (like Jack) were befuddled and irritated by a shifting world they did not understand. In the post-war era, Cochrane proposes, some men found “the answer to self-fulfillment in terms of lifestyles conducted around consumer goods,” but they also ran the risk of becoming “shallow” and “one-dimensional” (168). Scarfe's Kelvin is just that man: an ambitious, consumer-driven high-school principal who raises his offspring in the kind of suburban wasteland George Johnston so thoroughly denigrated in *My Brother Jack*; Kelvin also suffers from what Richard (echoing D. H. Lawrence) describes as the “the contagion of emotional repression so typically Australian” (*Laura* 17).

Although Jack is far from repressed (he boasts constantly about how tough he had to be to survive three years as a prisoner of war in Changi) and his economic status differs from the others (his family lives in poverty because he is unable to hold down a job),⁶ he, too, finds the world changing so quickly that his daughter Christine observes he is “about to crack [because] there is no keeping the world and its irritations out” (84). For example, when he discovers that George Johnston's *My Brother Jack*, which fails to laud the military master of World War Two veterans, is on the list of books set for English, he is so outraged that he hurls the novel onto the street. Jack is also stunned when he sees a young man on television burning a registration card and another setting fire to an Australian flag; he claims these anti-war protestors “don't belong to the real world,” which he predicts will soon be taken over by “little yellow bastards” (134-35) if they do not stop. Jack also holds rigidly conservative and racist views: he supports capital punishment but not unions, resents that the “‘whingeing Poms’ and the ‘Bloody abos’ think they own the place” (133), and complains that women who dress in saris should “fucking well fit in” (84) if they want to live in Australia.

On the surface, the comfortably well-off Clyde Rimshaw seems a cut above Jack Wheatley, but Clyde, too, is an unthinking patriot, a firm upholder of law and order, and hence guilty of outmoded thinking. Having earned a law degree while working with the Sydney police force, Clyde sides with his government's commitment to war (and everything else) and adheres strictly

to the accepted wisdom of the times which, as Cochrane stresses, entails “a willingness to settle for the way things are” (170). During heated debates with Glen, Clyde reiterates that it is every citizen’s duty—including his son’s—to obey his elected officials and the laws they have carefully constructed over time, even if they are bad laws, and moreover, that anyone who wishes to criticize or change the law must do so within its existing framework. But Glen, who grows increasingly exasperated with the repetitive nature of his father’s arguments, eventually accuses his father of behaving like Adolf Eichmann, who justified his crimes by declaring that he was only acting on orders from his leader.⁷ During these numerous and prolonged debates with his son, however, Clyde wonders only once if his years of service in the police force have caused his thinking to “calcify” (173).

These middle-aged fathers are also, to a greater or lesser extent, tyrants and bullies. Clyde believes that violence is occasionally justified and spans Glen even as an infant. As Glen matures, Clyde practices what might today be termed “tough love.” When Glen fails to do well in school, Clyde puts him through such a rigorous program of study that his mother-in-law calls him a “bully and a tyrant [who runs] his home like a police state” (Maas 124), and his wife Elaine claims (prophetically) that “even killing [his] own son doesn’t matter” (128). Scarfe’s Richard observes that his former Kelvin maintains a “constant bullying attitude to his family” (*Laura* 51); and both Kelvin and Ben, the husband in *Neither Here Nor There*, display violent tempers and strike their wives and children (not always their own) for what they construe as disobedience or insubordination. Jack Wheatley is the most abusive husband and father, however; although he believes hitting a woman is “cowardly,” he shouts so often that his wife Martha is “stupid” that Christine claims “it’s like the boards of the house have responded to the years of his bellowing with their cracked and peeling curls of paint” (199). As well, Jack plays rough with offspring and watches for signs of vulnerability in order to give his perpetual insults more sting. Because Jack always needs money (he smokes and drinks even when the family has no food), he forces the frail fourteen-year-old Johnnie to take on a physically demanding job that nearly kills him, and because he has a disdain for the intellect, he makes Jill quit high school, even though she is an excellent student with a bright future in the sciences. (Lonely and frustrated by her lack of knowledge and work at low-level positions, Jill attempts to educate herself by reading student newspapers and hanging around lecture halls at the University of Melbourne).

By contrast, the sons of these insensitive and mean fathers are motivated by an intense humanity; they detest violence, vengeance, or coercion of any kind, and want to make the world a kinder, gentler place. Thus they repudiate fighting, do not condone “legitimized murder,” refuse to be intimidated by a national mythology which places the Digger at its centre, and reject their father’s preoccupation with the Anzac legend, which Stephen Garton claims is “saturated in manhood” (86). (Often overlooked is the extent to which women writers also contributed to the adulation of the Anzac in their World War One and Two fictions.) As Cochrane observes, for members of the youth culture, “going away to fight” was no longer the “apotheosis of citizenship and manhood”; instead, young men began to

challenge the integrity of the soldier, to question the established connection between citizenship and military activity in Vietnam, to break up the strict standards of masculine conformity which had prevailed, it seemed for eons. For many observers (and some soldiers), the Vietnam War would seriously discredit the style of aggressive masculinity that had been kept alive (and culturally dominant) by a succession of “just wars” and the Cold war, for decades. (176)

Maas undermines this established masculinist/military ethos by creating Glen as a pacifist almost from infancy. Small for his age, he evades sports entirely, and declines, even when bullied, to fight or defend himself except by the unusual strategy of talking excessively. During high school, he is quiet and studious, writes poetry and has only one “mate,” the equally bookish and scholarly Mike, with whom he spends time reading. As adolescents, the not-so-dynamic duo become moderately famous for their social action songs which take aim at subjects such as parliamentary servants and their perks, acid rain, and the assassination of JFK. Glen, who composes the lyrics, also writes the occasional love song, a sure indicator that he is not a typical Australian bloke. While Maas’s Clyde wishes his son would defend himself on the playground, Scarfe’s “aggressively masculine” Kelvin has explicit ideas about what constitutes the character of “real boys”: they must love “dirt,” “football,” and “camping” (*Laura* 31), and want to study “proper” subjects such as Physics, Chemistry, and Maths (*Laura* 48). Kelvin dismisses his younger son Michael’s passion for painting as “recreational fribble” and the literature and history Jonathan loves reading as mere “scribbling” (42). Laura believes that she cannot “save her sons” from this “tribal society” which removes children from their mother’s influence and places them under a “totalitarian world of male values,” and acquiesces (*Laura* 31).

Although it seems risible today, another of the ways in which the rift between the generations played out was through hairstyles which, during the Vietnam War, took on a kind of symbolic importance. According to Donald Horne, “for three generations, short hair had been ‘a symbol of manliness, virility and national virtue in a country where long hair symbolized the evils of an impractical but arrogant intellectuality, or of a boozy and morally lax bohemian artiness, or a plain cissiness and poofsterism’” (cited in Cochrane, 172). Cochrane remarks, too, that the authorities associated “long and ungroomed hair with uncleanness, rampant sexuality and traitorous values. On young males it was understood in gender terms as a lack of manliness” (172). Moreover, “fashions suggested a rejection of the culturally dominant ideals of masculinity” (179); thus the “coloured shirts” and “flared trousers” worn by the young also challenged “traditional standards of masculinity” (179), and “had a lot of older people worried” (172). Among the worried is Clyde Rimshaw, who considers his son’s lengthy tresses and green velvet jacket with billowing sleeves unmanly. In his defense, Glen argues that young people should not be “ostracized” or “persecuted” as criminals because they simply want to try “something new,” and insists they have the right to dress as they please (298). Another of the anxious fathers is Jack Wheatley; like Clyde, he associates long hair with the feminine: when he spots a young man with hair on his collar, he “yells bullishly ... ‘Get a haircut, you poofsta’” (84). Jack also finds his son Johnnie’s “pretty” appearance—particularly his long curly locks—an “immense flaw, something close to an abomination” (20).

Another contentious issue which divided the generations was the right to protest. Jack Wheatley finds the idea so upsetting that when he catches Jill walking home with a resister after a demonstration, he throws her out of the house, permanently. Clyde Rimshaw's reaction is less extreme, but he holds fast to the view that neither Glen nor Larnie should participate in moratorium marches. Although Glen acknowledges that these forms of public protest are technically illegal, he contends that democracies have only ever been won by people breaking the law, and demonstrating in the streets is a well-tested tactic. When Clyde argues that the streets are to be used by *all* people, not just those who will disrupt ordinary life for one day, Glen retorts that no one gets upset when "royal visits, and returning soldiers, and Anzac Day parades often do this" (411). But when Glen insists that the protesters have agreed that they will be peaceful, that there will be no ugliness or violence on their part, Clyde answers that Glen cannot make such a "positive statement on behalf of the goodness of thousands of people" (409).

Although Clyde, now Metropolitan Superintendent of the Sydney Police Force, is unreservedly against the right to protest, Malcolm Saunders points out that because opinion polls continued to suggest that the majority of the population supported the government's decision to send troops to Vietnam and to conscript its young men, the federal government was not overly concerned about anti-war demonstrations until the late 1960s (367). Thus it regarded protests such as those against Johnson's visit to Australia as "minor irritants" which represented only a "small minority of the community at large" (368). When the government "bother[ed] to attack the peace movement, it fell back on the familiar strategy of denouncing it as Communist-inspired and Communist-controlled" (368). But the federal government nevertheless paid close attention to the "law and order" issue Richard Nixon developed to help him win the 1968 election. In his platform, he declared that the United States had become "the most lawless and violent in the history of free peoples" (369), and promised that, if elected, he would not only bring an end to the war, but would "adopt a program of general domestic repression" (369). Inspired by Nixon's success at the polls, the Australian federal government began to devise their own "law and order" tactics and encouraged the states to follow suit. Both levels of government continued to claim that communists were controlling social protest, but then, adopting Nixon's strategy, they attempted to frighten people, including draft dodgers, by enforcing the National Service Act, which they had been reluctant to do until that point. Various levels of government further predicted that the peace marches would turn violent and result in clashes between anti-war demonstrators and police or pro-war demonstrators. But as Maas's narrator notes, some of these pronouncements were intentionally confrontational: on the eve of Anzac Day, for example, the New South Wales government publicly referred to those who wanted peace as "a fifth column more monstrous than anything Hitler could ever have devised" (407). The inciting rhetoric heated up even further when the Minister for Labor referred to the moratorium organizers as "political bikies pack raping democracy," a comment Maas includes in her text and which her narrator declares has been "universally censured for its hysteria and bad taste" (407).

These incendiary tactics proved ineffectual, however, for as Maas's novel underscores, the first of the moratorium marches, held around the country on May 8, was wholly peaceful. According

to Curthoys, herself a protestor, the march was “successful beyond the wildest dreams of its organizers” (157), and Saunders, too, writes that the May 8 march turned out to be the “peak of the anti-war movement’s activities”; it mobilized huge numbers of people (25,000 turned out in Sydney) and demonstrated that “street marches supported by tens of thousands of people held in an atmosphere of controversy and tension could still be peaceful” (372), a set of circumstances Maas’s novel also documents. The success of that first march clearly threatened conservative politicians, for they immediately began to condemn the upcoming September 18 march as “lawless,” and their strict “law and order” campaign became the “principal stick” with which to “beat the peace movement” (Saunders 377). Initially, as Maas’s narrator observes, politicians sought to discredit the marchers by labeling them riffraff, communists, traitors, and violent extremists; their slurs were further shored up by the RSL, who declared the protestors were “either abysmally ignorant or ... purposefully working for totalitarian victory” (407). The most inflammatory rhetoric came from New South Wales Premier Askin, who called protesters “just a heap of garbage,” a vitriolic phrase Maas includes in her novel (410).

These protestations appear to have had the desired effect, since many civic, police, and state authorities instigated repressive measures. As Maas’s novel indicates, University of Sydney administrators, who had not stood in the way of the first march, become obstructionist during the second and prohibited students from gathering on the Commons. Civic authorities prevented marchers from gathering at the Town Hall, the Domain, or Hyde Park, and now required them to request a permit to walk on the streets, although none had been asked for on the May 8 march. Glen notes that this demand was simply a ruse, because when moratorium marchers complied with the rules and requested a permit weeks in advance of the second march, they received no reply. Saunders writes that many citizens believed their government was being “deliberately provocative” in hopes of increasing the likelihood of violence at demonstrations (371), a conviction Maas clearly shares, for in her novel, the police—under the authority of Clyde Rimshaw—actively seek confrontation with the demonstrators, the authorities’ senseless acts of brutality against peaceful demonstrators thus turning the march into a scene of chaos and disorder.

Maas appears to have modeled Rimshaw on the real-life Norman Allan for, according to Saunders, as police commissioner at the time, Allan “mobilized the largest force of police ever assembled for an anti-war demonstration anywhere in Australia” (373). Maas’s narrator refers to Rimshaw as the “architect of brutality and shame” (480) because he appears to have been swayed by the thinking of conservative politicians who convinced him that instead of using the police force to protect citizens, he should deploy it for political purposes. Clyde’s orders also lead to the somewhat melodramatic death of his son Glen who, ever since he was a child, has expressed sympathy for the underdog or the needy. Accordingly, in the midst of the confusion, Glen tries to help an elderly man who is being jostled by the crowd, but the police beat Glen and fling him onto the road, where he is then run over by a car. (Here, Maas may have intended readers to recall Askin’s instructions to “run over the bastards” [Hancock 355] who were protesting Johnson’s visit to Sydney.) Clearly, Maas constructs Glen’s death as a cautionary note to the government, for in her “Dedication” to the novel, she declares that it is “responsible for

building a society in which the culminating event of this story could well be not only possible, but inevitable” (n.p.). She then pleads with these “guardians of democracy [to] reorient their thinking so as to recognize that a democratic government dignifies its people rather than degrading and suppressing them” (n.p.). The “culminating event”—Glen’s death—thus stresses that courageous young men had “as much a right to live” as anyone else, but they were betrayed by their nation’s participation in an unnecessary and immoral war.

But as Cornelius’s novel points out, those who expressed loyalty to the government also paid a high price. Michael returns from his tour of duty wounded in mind, unable to speak about his experiences or adapt to daily life: “it’s like he died,” observes his sister Christine (203-4). His homecoming also proves traumatic because, as Cochrane observes, returned soldiers were no longer feted as they had been in previous wars; “many saw [this war] as immoral and its perpetrators as bullies and ‘butchers’” (204). Jack Wheatley is thus infuriated when he learns that Michael has been told to make his “own way” home because the military wants “to avoid trouble with the demonstrators,” and irate that he was advised not to wear his uniform home because “a lot of people don’t feel very friendly towards it” (202-3). Jack simply cannot understand that in some circles, the returned soldier had now become the enemy, or that many believed that it required more courage to be a conscientious objector than it did to go to war.

In the end, the battles these patriarchs wage against their offspring result in numerous home-front losses: Clyde’s “get tough” approach contributes to his wayward daughter’s suicide, and Kelvin’s homophobia causes his youngest son Michael to take his own life. Similarly, Jack’s homophobia drives his son Johnnie as far away from home as possible. Cornelius’s Christine is the only one of these young radicals whose future appears promising: at the end of the novel, she has left home and is studying at the University of Melbourne. By contrast, her sister Jill, who desperately wanted an education, has become pregnant, married young, and at the end of the novel, is unhappily expecting another child. Wives and mothers are also losers in these combative homes. Cornelius’s Martha spends her days watching television alone, having never developed relationships with friends or family because her husband Jack, a typical abuser, would never allow visitors into *his* house. Only in Scarfe’s novels do women move from positions of weakness to strength, but their journeys to self-actualization are fraught because, as Pemberton observes, the “participation of women in Australian political life was rare throughout the sixties” (76). Curthoys, too, acknowledges that it took courage to be supportive of women’s issues; even during the Vietnam War, their position within the protest movement was marginal: “We didn’t even have the language to discuss it then, and words like sexism and male chauvinism did not emerge until around 1970. Women were in a very second class position, there was no doubt about it. The spokespeople were always men, and they were very sexist men” (cited in Langley, 96).

Both of Scarfe’s novels depict “very sexist men” who dictate the way their households and families are run. In *Neither Here Nor There*, the childless primary school teacher Elizabeth Kingswell’s desire to offer refuge to one of her students after his sole care-giver dies causes a permanent rift in her marriage because her husband Ben (who wants no children) refuses.

Although Elizabeth had arguably married Ben because she had admired his kindness and liberal thinking, she suddenly realizes she has been in error when she attends a “radical cell” meeting and discovers her husband is “conditioned by a set of political theories” which he applies to “all actions and all events,” even though they may be inappropriate to the social context such as the Vietnam War, and may even occasionally include the condoning of violence. When she vocalizes her objections and Ben belittles her remarks, she becomes increasingly disturbed, for she had not until that moment realized that she was married to a man who “fundamentally distrusts emotion ... denigrates it [and who] never recognize[s] that some truths [are] derived from emotional awareness” (25).

In drawing attention to the distinctions between men’s rational and women’s emotional approaches to complex moral situations, Scarfe reflects psychologist Carol Gilligan’s challenge to male theorists’ privileging of men’s reliance upon abstract concepts such as justice, right, and duty, and the concomitant conclusion that women’s moral reasoning tends to be primitive because it is more intuitive and concerned less with principle (cited in Benhabib, 267). According to Seyla Benhabib, Gilligan argues that “women’s moral judgment is more contextual, more immersed in the details of relationships and narratives. It shows a greater propensity to take the standpoint of the ‘particular other’, and women appear more adept at revealing feelings of empathy and sympathy required by this” (270). In Gilligan’s view, “the respect for each other’s needs and the mutuality of effort to satisfy them sustain moral growth and development” (cited in Benhabib, 270). Both of Scarfe’s novels demonstrate that Laura’s and Elizabeth’s compassion for others allows them to “sustain moral growth and development,” whereas their husbands Kelvin and Ben, have, like Clyde Rimshaw, allowed their thinking to “calcify,” and thus remain static and fail to develop with the times.

The testing ground for Scarfe’s theories is the Vietnam War. Although there are exceptions, in *Neither Here Nor There* she develops a series of binary oppositions which situate male politicians, educators, ministers, social workers, political organizers, and heads of families in the “abstract concept” camp. Much disagreement exists between these groups over how to conduct protests, because each faction claims to know how the community will react. Since none of their political stances is impartial, those with most institutional power become the most influential. The novel underscores how little concern these institutional representatives exhibit over the real suffering the war brings. Although these important men have both the resources and the power to aid innocent victims, particularly Vietnamese children damaged by napalm or bomb attacks, none sees that as an important role (104). As one woman’s advocate for children puts it, they are simply “big men having a look at war and pushing people around. But they never have a close look at the slaughter. They can’t even look at one child” (104). For the most part, these prominent men are waging a paper war, one in which they themselves are never in danger.

Both an Anglican minister, with whom Elizabeth has an affair, and her husband Ben, reveal they are willing to sacrifice the well-being of underprivileged Australian and Vietnamese children (both in general and individual terms) in order to satisfy their own selfish (read sexual) needs. Whenever Elizabeth mentions attempting to save wounded children, Ben insists that she is

wasting her time trying to save a few children when there are thousands in need, a response which renders her insecure about her feelings and opinions. Only through engagement with other women does Elizabeth learn to find strength in her convictions. By chance, she meets a woman who has served as a war correspondent in Vietnam and has adopted a young Vietnamese girl. The woman introduces Elizabeth to others who, like her, concentrate on saving a few individual children, even though thousands are in need. They believe that “anyone who has no sympathy for an injured child hasn’t got any respect for broader social issues” (104). Elizabeth is also introduced to the Friends of Society, a group of Quakers who endeavour to fund medical treatment for injured Vietnamese children. The two groups disagree about the direction these children’s futures should take: the Quakers wish to use the children’s plights to raise governmental awareness of the problems, but they draw the line at adoption. Significantly, these women work out their disagreements through negotiation and compromise, not aggressive power struggles; their discussions always have at heart the welfare of children. (Elizabeth has earlier encountered similar feelings of good will among the nuns at the orphanage where her troubled student is placed, as well as among the female police officers in charge of disadvantaged children.)

Although Elizabeth is not certain “whether the conflict ... over Australia’s participation in the Vietnam War had made her super sensitive to the attitudes of others or whether it had simply stimulated her intelligence and activated long sleeping values” (102), it is clear that she will no longer tolerate her husband’s denunciation of her feelings or his violent outbursts. Although she is panicky and apprehensive about her future, she vows never again to be dependent upon others. In the final pages, she is standing on the steps of the Melbourne GPO handing out pamphlets designed to raise the moratorium marchers’ awareness of the victimization of Vietnamese children; her actions, she knows, could lead to her arrest, but she bravely defies the law. Scarfe’s ending in *Laura* is similar: as Laura’s concern for her son Jonathon’s well being increases, she no longer dedicates herself solely to pleasing her husband and children, but begins reading about the Vietnam War, joins the SOS movement and, determined to defeat the Liberals (Whitlam has become her “hero”), becomes a member of the Labor Party. Arrested and gaoled briefly for hitting a police officer outside the American Embassy, she remains undaunted, and continues to protest the war by standing outside Parliament House every Friday night wearing a black armband and carrying a placard.

Burke’s *Speaking*, the most structurally experimental of these novels, further stresses the importance of women’s joining forces to combat the conservative and masculinist culture they inhabit, but with one important difference: her protagonist, Lily Wolfe, dismisses the feminist movement as irrelevant, in part because she has been raised by her father, an important member of the Communist Party, who introduces her to the male structure of politics, which she thereafter embraces. Her father’s training enables her to become a prominent member of the protest movement, but even when she becomes aware that she operates within a male-dominated, sexist milieu where men either treat women as if they were invisible or steal their ideas, she ignores their blatant sexism because she earns recognition from both men and women through her genius for organizing and her ability to “speak,” or more often, to yell. (In her review of the

novel, Sarah Dowse refers to Lily as “a sort of Weatherman of the antipodes” [59], and one of Lily’s friends refers to her as the “Angela Davis of student politics” [32]). At the May 8 moratorium—which she later refers to as “the best day of her life” (65)—she incites thousands of marchers to believe that they can bring an end to the war if only they will commit themselves to doing so. Her oratorical skills seem to bode well because, as Margaret Henderson points out, “[w]omen’s speaking out about their experiences and oppression has been fundamental to the modern women’s movement, being used as a political tactic to confront and challenge” (?), [as Cora Kaplan puts it], ‘the patriarchal convention that enjoined women to deferential silence’ and the ‘related suppression of women’s speech, writing, and sexuality’” (cited in Henderson, 133). But Lily is neither speaking against female oppression nor for peace—the word she uses most often is “fight”)—but advocating “revolution” that will change the world by bringing an end to capitalism. It takes her nearly a decade, though (the novel is set in 1980), to recognize that she has been badly served by stayed “loyal to the political paradigm that oppresses her” and by “screwing” nearly every man in the anti-war movement, because “the cavalcade of cocks” (37) fails to support her when she is thrown out of the University of Melbourne for her radical politics and abandons her when she becomes pregnant.

Accordingly, when the revolution fizzles and her disillusionment with party politics reaches its peak, she has nothing to fall back on, for she has declared war on her friends (a poet, a painter, a lesbian arts administrator, and a research assistant to a conservative politician) who try to support her. Throughout the novel, Burke employs military language to indicate the kind of relationship Lily has with her friends, who characterize their gatherings as “combative offensives” (63) where Lily “controls the manoeuvres and triumphs because she is a superb markswoman” (70). Lily aims most of her barbs at the women’s movement, especially consciousness-raising groups, which she views as banal outpourings of emotion and gushy sentiments about love, which she calls a “minor ailment” (75). But after many failed starts at jobs in Melbourne and London, she remains so haunted by her failed past, so “mad with memories” (15), that she determines to write a history of the anti-war movement. Lily’s conception of her history, however, is rambling and confused, because as Henderson points out, she lacks the “insights and experiences provided by the women’s movement” (135) which would have encouraged her not to obliterate her own subjectivity. The narrative thus follows Lily’s struggles with feminism and her “gradual realization of the inadequacy of her particular form of leftist politics” (Burke 135).

Before Lily reaches rock-bottom, she is saved by Raider, an Aborigine who is politically involved with the Aboriginal land claims movement, and who supports her efforts to write. (He is one of the few good men in these texts [Scarfe’s Richard is another]). In an interview with Jim Davidson, Burke suggests that Raider is the only one “who really perceives what is happening to Lily and the way that she can get out of it” (44). Unlike Lily, he does not challenge the world to a fight, but attempts to “guard ... what was his and seek ... what had been stolen,” and in the process, struggles to show the “white country” how “blind” they have been to the effects of colonization and how “blind” they are now to the harmful effects of uranium mining in the Northern Territory (294). When Lily expresses interest in becoming involved, he tells her it’s not her “party,” that “she’s not running the show,” and that she will have to do learn to do politics

differently, which she does (296). When Raider is arrested and put in prison, Lily is spurred on to actually do something. She declares a kind of truce with her friends, takes steps to help further their careers, perhaps even saves a marriage, and begins to recognize the value of the feminist movement. However, Burke seems to suggest here, though, that the feminist movement may have had its limitations, because arguably, without the aid of the skills Lily garnered while working within male political structures, several of her friends' lives/careers might have floundered.

Lily also channels her considerable energies into Indigenous issues, a move which seems appropriate because, as Pemberton points out, Aboriginal people [like Raider] were "becoming increasingly politicized" (234). The young radicals in both Maas and Cornelius's novels were also identifying a range of societal ills—Indigenous issues, environmental concerns such as mining in the Blue Mountains, and the White Australia policy—which they intend to tackle. Although it is difficult to state whether any of their struggles (fictional or otherwise) to make Australia a better place had much impact or any sustaining power, Pemberton suggests it would be "very wrong to deny the enormous impact that the Vietnam conflict, both home and abroad, had on Australian society" (233). He asserts "there was a growing mood of discontent with our subordination to British and American influence," and that the country eventually had to accept "that its main effective relations were with Asian nations" (234). He also claims that the

women's movement was revitalized through its experience in the anti-war movement, not just through criticism of the traditional patriarchal structures which had produced Vietnam, but also through criticism of the male domination of the anti-war movement itself. For many women, the war was the first time they were involved in political activity, certainly in a public way, often defying not only convention but also their peers, husbands and perhaps even their sons. (234)

Pemberton's observations reflect the changing gender structures which Scarfe and Burke identified in their novels, and which may indeed be one of the legacies of the Vietnam War. As I write this essay, the Prime Minister, the Governor-General, and Premiers in New South Wales, Tasmania, and Queensland are women who represent a political power structure that would have been inconceivable in the period covered by these novels.

But both Pemberton and Langley have also argued that changes in attitude to the military ethos may have been one of the positive lasting legacies of the anti-Vietnam movement (Pemberton 233, Langley xii), although their comments have proven premature; as Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds claim, "for several years now Australia has seen the relentless militarization of our history ... The Anzac spirit is now said to animate all our greatest achievements, even as the Anzac landing recedes into the distant past" ("Preface," vii). Furthermore, in their chapter on the Vietnam War, Carina Donaldson and Lake note that the protest movement, which "celebrated a progressive, urban, culturally innovative nation committed to the goals of sexual and racial equality, an Australia that was forward looking and multicultural, rather than locked into the British tradition of its past" (89), appears to have lost the home front battle. In her Introduction

Lake argues that the time has come (again) to “proclaim ourselves a free and independent republic, enshrining not militarist values, but the civil and political values of equality and justice, which in an earlier era had been thought to define a distinctive ‘Australian ethos’” (2). It would be fitting and proper were the nation’s women leaders working to achieve that goal—their gender having been, after all, left out of the “getting of nationhood” at Anzac Cove.⁸

But I’m not counting on it.

Notes

1 In Helen Hodgman’s *Jack and Jill*, the central character, Jill, takes up a petition to help stop the war, and then suffers a head wound from a police attack during a Vietnam War protest in Sydney, but the episodes are brief. The opening scene of Adrienne Sallay’s *Loaded Hearts* takes place during the May 8, 1970, moratorium march in Sydney, but the instances of police brutality seem out of place because, by all accounts, the march was entirely peaceful. Sallay’s novel focuses more on the plight of the returned soldier who has fought with the Americans than the protest movement. For more analysis of the difficulties returned soldiers faced, see Donna Coates, “Coming Home.” See also Evie Wyld’s *After the Fire, a Still Small Voice*, which offers a sympathetic view of both Korean and Vietnam War veterans, and Neilma Sidney’s *The Return*, which features an American soldier who deserts the army during his R & R leave in Sydney and then seeks refuge in the Australian bush.

2 Although Maas’s novel concentrates on the moratorium marches, it also mentions school teacher William White’s arrest, imprisonment, and suspension from his job (276), and the “terrible persecution of Simon Townsend and others like him” (418).

3 In Gayla Reid’s “Sister Doyle’s Men,” a short story in *To Be There With You: Stories of Longing and Desire*, a young man who is conscripted in New South Wales “disappears” into Western Australia. “Contemptuous” and “hostile” plainclothesmen and military police hound his sister about his whereabouts.

4 In Cornelius’s unpublished play “Jack’s Daughters” (1989), loosely based on the same subject, one of the daughters succeeds in killing Jack.

5 In Hodgman’s *Jack and Jill*, Jack, another World War Two veteran, also takes a dim view of resisters, whom he calls “limp-wristed conchie[s]” (45).

6 In “War and Masculinity in Twentieth Century Australia,” Stephen Garton argues that men like Jack found war “an exaggeration of manliness” and hence assimilating to the “more domestic and sedentary life of the modern breadwinner” proved difficult (93). His recurring nightmares and alcoholism suggest he may be suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Indicative of the times, he is offered no counselling or medical treatment; doctors tell his wife Martha not to let him talk about his feelings, the kind of response we now know was misguided.

7 Langley writes that protestors defended their positions “on principles of individual conscience which harked back to the Nuremberg judgments of World War Two ... One of the central principles of Nuremberg was that obeying orders is not a defence. This implies that a moral imperative is placed on individuals to find out the consequences of government policies and their role within them” (xi-xii).

8 War correspondent C. E. W. Bean's famous proclamation, that "in those days (the First World War) Australia became fully conscious of itself as a nation" (xlvii), celebrated an event that absented women.

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