



1988

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Chris Tiffin

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Recommended Citation

Tiffin, Chris, Relentless Realism: Archie Weller's Going Home, *Kunapipi*, 10(1), 1988.
Available at: <http://ro.uow.edu.au/kunapipi/vol10/iss1/25>

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Abstract

In his two books, *The Day of the Dog* and *Going Home* Archie Weller has established himself as the leading chronicler of the lives of urban and fringe Aboriginals. His narratives are searing and depressing accounts of an existence which affords few gratifications and is irretrievably circumscribed by white power. Only very occasionally in Weller's fiction is there any fruitful and productive contact between Aboriginal and white,² and even when this occurs the effect is quickly swept away by events. The narratives are almost invariably closed. Where they do not end in actual death they involve either a return to jail or a definitive repudiation of former hopes. Unlike the Maori writers, Patricia Grace and Witi Ihimaera, who often write about incidents in Maori life or Maori-Pakeha relationships which allow for a redirection of attitudes and a future, Weller's stories take the shape of representative life sagas ending in tragedy or stultification whether they are extended account as in *The Day of the Dog* or 'Cooley' or whether they are only a few pages in length like 'Pension Day'. Sometimes the life can even be summed up in an aphorism: 'Cooley, the dreamer. Cooley, the hate-filled and hated half-caste, Cooley, the dead boy.' (p. 212)

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In his two books, *The Day of the Dog* and *Going Home*,¹ Archie Weller has established himself as the leading chronicler of the lives of urban and fringe Aboriginals. His narratives are searing and depressing accounts of an existence which affords few gratifications and is irretrievably circumscribed by white power. Only very occasionally in Weller's fiction is there any fruitful and productive contact between Aboriginal and white,² and even when this occurs the effect is quickly swept away by events. The narratives are almost invariably closed. Where they do not end in actual death they involve either a return to jail or a definitive repudiation of former hopes. Unlike the Maori writers, Patricia Grace and Witi Ihimaera, who often write about incidents in Maori life or Maori-Pakeha relationships which allow for a redirection of attitudes and a future, Weller's stories take the shape of representative life sagas ending in tragedy or stultification whether they are extended accounts as in *The Day of the Dog* or 'Cooley' or whether they are only a few pages in length like 'Pension Day'. Sometimes the life can even be summed up in an aphorism: 'Cooley, the dreamer. Cooley, the hate-filled and hated half-caste, Cooley, the dead boy.' (p. 212)

Paradoxically, then, Weller views as directed totalities lives which are conceived of by the livers only in fragmentary and very immediate terms. Even in 'One Hot Night' which departs from his normal narrative mode in sharing the focus among a number of differentiated protagonists, the direction of the story is still strongly centripetal. The first three sections show the principal characters in different parts of the city with disparate concerns. In subsequent sections their paths overlap and they proceed inexorably towards confrontation with the police and jail. For some this process is self-induced, but for others it is an inevitability born of their colour and class, no matter how strong their intentions are to the contrary. 'Murry is a criminal now. If he gets caught, it's an end to all his dreams. And all he wanted to do was go home.' (p. 88)

The titles of the two books point up this sense of closure and containment. 'The Day of the Dog' recalls the proverb, 'every dog has its day', which grudgingly celebrates a (brief) period of triumph, but only within an overall framework of ontological inferiority. In Weller's fiction the reality of that inferiority, socially and economically rather than ontologically conceived, is destructively reasserted by the end of the story. Less immediately, the title picks up another traditional saying, 'Give a dog a bad name ...' a piece of pre-Barthesian wisdom suggesting that people will act in accordance with declared negative expectations of them. These two lines of thought fuse in the texture of the world of Weller's stories. Ironically, 'the day' does not come adventitiously to the 'dog'. It is the label of inferiority put upon them by the whites which drives Weller's Aboriginals to try to achieve in white terms. For a while they enjoy the illusion of success and acceptance, but inevitably they learn that they have not really escaped from their racially-determined place in society.

Perhaps it had always been that way. While Clayton had thought he was getting somewhere in life, he had, in reality, been going nowhere. ... All the time he had thought he was someone – Baby Clay, the champion boxer – and all the people had stared and laughed to see him act the fool. ... He had thought he had found truth but had found only false glory. (p. 30)

The title, 'Going Home', also embodies this causal irony. The story from which the title is taken tells of a white-educated Aboriginal who has succeeded in the white world as footballer and painter returning to his parents' home to celebrate his twenty-first birthday. He learns that his derelict father has been dead for two years, but is still able to make the first steps towards reintegration with his family before he is gratuitously picked up by the police on suspicion of robbery. The story ends with him and his brother in the back of the police van. Instead of being given the key of the door to the white world on his birthday, or even being allowed to rediscover his Aboriginal world unmolested, he is inducted into his 'real home' as society constructs it: police custody and jail. Similar treatments of white society redefining an Aboriginal's home are found in Jack Davis's *Kullark*, and Sally Morgan's *My Place*.

Much of Weller's fiction is devoted to depicting this pressure upon urban Aboriginals and the strategies they adopt to survive and to transcend it. Inevitably, Aboriginals are depicted as holding to some defensive enclave.

The enclave may be metaphorical, like Reg Cooley's 'fortress' (p. 198) or literal, like the caravan the boxers inhabit (p. 29). It may be natural like the night which protects Murry and Lynette (p. 81) or man-made like the car Billy Woodward drives home in (p. 1). The most important enclave of all is the family which is discussed below. Outside their enclaves the characters are awkward and wary. A favourite locational word then is 'corner' combining the senses of marginalisation, the aggression of the boxing ring and being at bay.³ Whether it is a train, a nightclub, a coffee shop or even the back of the police van, the Aboriginal characters seem instinctively to gravitate to this corner position.

One ambiguous strategy for survival under this pressure is a prudent withdrawal in the face of white harassment. Prudent withdrawal involves avoiding conflict by staying out of the way of whites or making suitable obeisances when confrontation looms. On one level this can be seen as ignoble and cowardly. In 'Going Home', for example,

Darcy sidles up to the fuming barman.

"Scuse me, Mr 'Owett, but William 'ere just come 'ome see,' he whines like a beaten dog. We *will* be drinkin' in the camp, ya know.'

.....

'Well all right, Darcy. I'll forget about it this time. Just keep your friend out of my hair.'

Good dog, Darcy. Have a bone, Darcy. Or will a carton of stubbies do? (p. 6)

But it is important to ask, seen as ignoble by whom? For this is not the authorial voice, but rather the bitter internal comment of Billy Woodward who had thought he was accepted in white society and who now discovers the hollowness of such acceptance. He is appalled by the loss of dignity he suddenly suffers. But however it appears to the white publican, Darcy's intervention is not from powerless subservience but rather the calculated one of the manipulator of the situation. They *do* get their beer, and as they carry it off Darcy tells Billy, 'Act stupid, buddy, an' ya go a lo--ong way in this town.' (p.6)⁴

Some of the ambiguity of the power dynamics of the situation arises from Weller's use of the image, 'like a beaten dog'. The white publican sees Darcy as 'beaten' in the sense of defeated, and hence is prepared to be magnanimous when he is presented with an appropriate pose of subservience. The reality, though, is that Darcy is 'beaten' only in the sense of being struck, without the concomitant implication that the imposition has been definitive,

or that the power lies exclusively with the white man. In a similar way, 'dog' extends some of the ironies noted earlier. Historically, from the nineteenth century the Aborigines in Australia were labelled by the whites as cowardly, because of their curious reluctance to line up and be shot à la Charge of the Light Brigade.⁵ Words like 'dog', 'cur' and 'dingo' have been frequently used in such labels. Weller's work engages directly with that sort of thinking, since in depicting the social conditions under which Aborigines live he simultaneously exposes the stereotyping they have endured and continue to endure. Heroism-as-suicide may have been a useful imperial fetish, but Weller makes clear that it has little to recommend it as a practice for modern Aboriginal society.

A similar use of the image of canine evasiveness occurs in 'Cooley' when the protagonist is confronted by a group of white youths who beat him up. 'Once Cooley would have run off like a stray dog, at the sight of all those boys, but lately he had been left alone and his wariness had ebbed. ... Only when they surrounded him and stared silently at him did he realise his danger.' (p. 203) When he is eventually goaded into fighting, Cooley is compared to a dingo, not in the traditional white Australian image of cowardice, but rather in an image of magnificent power and predatoriness:

All the white boys saw was a thin, weedy half-caste. Then he sprang like a dingo, brown and sleek, into a mob of white sheep, all the more menacing in his silence. (p. 204)

This is a daring reversal of the values of the image. In white Australian discourse, the dingo is the cunning, cowardly and wasteful killer of defenceless, useful animals. Weller rewrites the cunning as disguise, but it is apparent disguise only. In arrogant misapprehension the white youths expect a Clark Kent, but find a Superman. Perhaps, ironically, they were correct in their original apprehension, for it is only when they goad Cooley too far that their taunts call the predatory animal into being. The traditional values of sheep are likewise inverted. While in the Western tradition the sheep/lamb is a symbol of meek gentleness and innocence, from an Aboriginal point of view it is the sheep, as symbol of white pastoral expansion, which has been the major cause of their progressive dispossession. Weller's forceful association of the sheep with the whites who are about to attack the Aboriginal is thus not capricious or arbitrary but historically recuperative.

To varying degrees, Weller's characters are sustained by a sense of racial pride, although it is often a confused and sometimes desperate sense of identity that is left them. At the opening of 'Going Home' Billy Woodward is explicitly isolated from the natural/Aboriginal world, but still instinctively parallels his sense of achievement and belonging with that of his forebears.

Out into the world of magpies' soothing carols, and parrots' cheeky whistles, of descending darkness and spirits.

The man doesn't know that world. His is the world of the sleek new Kingswood that speeds down the never-ending highway.

At last he can walk this earth with pride, as his ancestors did many years before him. He had his first exhibition of paintings a month ago. They sold well, and with the proceeds he bought the car. (p. 1)

The sense of achievement in a white world is undermined by its reference to an ancestral pride in two ways. In the first place the action of the story shows that not only is his sense of achievement and consequent acceptance illusory but that it is precisely because of his blood link with his ancestors that he is not really accepted. Far from continuing a proud tradition, although in a different sphere of endeavour, he finds that his connection with that older tradition, albeit tenuous, renders his own success nugatory. In the second place there is a more fundamental aporia between Aboriginal tradition and achievement in white terms. It is axiomatic to the discourse of Aboriginal writing in English that Aboriginal identity is valuable and to be preserved and fostered. Hence the abandonment of it is always displayed negatively. In this present story, Billy's achievements and his satisfaction are thus undermined not only by a suspicious and resentful white authority but also by his own guilt at neglect of community and tradition.

Pathetically confused references to traditional beliefs are a constant reminder of the deracination of the contemporary Aboriginal. In 'Saturday Night and Sunday Morning' after robbing a service station, one of the characters outlines his plans:

'Yeah, first thing I'm goin' to get is a telescopic rifle,' and the Wolf smiles a secret smile.

To own a gun is the last step in his initiation. *Then* he can own the world. And even when at last he dies, his name will live on like the trees and the rocks and the stars. *That* will be his soul, but it will be more famous than *any* of his ancestors. (p. 64)

In a similar way Reg Cooley mistakes his first sexual experiences with a promiscuous white girl as 'his Dreaming' (p. 161). At other times though, he is more clear-sighted about his inheritance, and is determined one day to reclaim it (pp. 140-141).

Two qualities which are seen in a positive light and which are associated with racial pride are a courageous stoicism, and a strong, even overwhelming community sense. The courage includes schoolchildren hiding their hurt: 'He cried a bit, but he was an Abo so didn't cry for long' (p. 97) which is elsewhere glossed as a refusal to allow the tormentor to see the suffering that he has caused. 'I had to bite back the tears: it would never do for a Nyoongah to cry in front of our number one enemies.' (p. 41) At the other end of the spectrum this stoicism appears as a sort of enthusiastic fatalism which allows for life to continue despite constant repression and intervention by hostile authority. One of the best renditions of this is the short piece, 'Fish and Chips'. In it, a teenager describes the sixteen members of his household and a sample of their activities. What emerges is a series of apparently guileless juxtapositions between an exuberance and sense of enjoyment of life on the one hand and a pattern of violence and criminality on the other. While the narrator makes some general observations, 'We're all Whittys together: there is no hope for us if we don't stick together' (p. 131), most of the power of the story comes from the implicit acceptance as normal of what most readers would find a devastating indictment of social organisation.

[Jimmy] might not have been able to fight, but he was a solid dancer: his legs were rubber and his body was elastic, so Mum said. You should hear his impersonations of Elvis Presley and Humphrey Bogart.

But he assaulted a policeman who took him up into a back alley to belt him around.
(p. 132)

This is skilful use of juxtaposition. The apparent focal point for the naive narrator is Jimmy's dancing ability which is contrasted with his lack of ability in fighting. But the sense of enjoyment of Jimmy's peaceable talents is suddenly cut across by the abrupt statement of his crime. That we have already been told he was not a fighter underlines the disjuncture between the legal term 'assault' and the colloquial 'belt around'. Police may 'belt around' an Aboriginal with relative impunity so long as they are discreet enough to do so out of the public view and the colloquial register asserts

both the legitimacy and the casual normality of the occurrence. Resistance to this treatment though is 'assault' which places the action immediately in the socially constructed judicial arena. As for Ezeulu in Achebe's *Arrow of God*, language becomes focally complicit in Jimmy's oppression.⁶ A similar back-alley incident is spelled out much more fully and graphically in the story, 'Saturday Night and Sunday Morning' (p. 59), but the implications of this brief 'innocent' narration are more chillingly felt.

The stoical elasticity under oppression is maintained by strength drawn from family and kin. It is a truism of Aboriginal writing that the family is the point of connection both between individual and society and between individual and his/her culture. It is also the basis of a sort of corporate identity. As one character says, 'We've got cousins everywhere; we'd be no one without cousins.' (p. 135) The strength of this bond is grudgingly recognised even by whites who disparage it in an image of flies congregating. 'You bastards stick together like flies on a dunny wall.' (p.11) In 'Violet Crumble' it is an implicit condemnation of Sammy that he can use that image himself.

My mob used to hang around me like flies. Every prize I'd win, the whole tribe would be in for their share. There'd be none left for me. One day I had a big brawl and told them all to clear off. I shifted over east for a few years and haven't looked back since.
(p 112)

Family support is equally necessary in the inter-clan fighting which occupies much of the urban characters' time. Not only money and possessions but quarrels are shared family matters, and as in traditional Aboriginal society, an injury by one member of a family or clan can provoke retaliation against any other member. Thus the laconic response of Lynette to Murry's self-absorbed romanticism in 'One Hot Night':

'We'd better go soon, Murry. The 'Owes'll be everywhere.'

'They won't bother us,' the giant rumbles.

The girl realises he is still white, in many ways as well as in his manner of making love. She sits up and takes out cigarettes for them both.

'They will if they know ya one of Elgin's people.' (p. 85)

It is the mark of the total isolation of Cooley, the protagonist of the novella which concludes the book, that he has no family support. He lives in an all-white household, since his full brother has left to play football in the east,

and his white father has remarried a white woman and clearly regrets his earlier marriage and its offspring. He has no kinship with the other Aboriginals in the area since he comes from further north. While Cooley receives the support of other Aboriginals when it comes to fights with the white youths, at crucial times he realises how alone he is. Significantly he is finally shot not by a white policeman, but by an Aboriginal.

The Aboriginal family is portrayed as imperative as well as supportive. Weller reiterates the belief that no matter how hard an Aboriginal tries to put aside his family it will call him back eventually. Talking to Darcy, Billy Woodward 'suddenly ... has to know all about his family and become lost in their sea of brownness.' (p. 5) Similarly in 'One Hot Night', despite being fostered in a white home Murray James finds that 'the murmurings of his people stirred in his heart and he wandered home again to Lockridge camp.' (p. 78) In 'Fish and Chips' the narrator predicts that his sister, who has disowned the family and married a white, will be back. 'She can't stay away from home forever. No one can.' (p. 133) Even the landscape can take part in this recall. In 'Violet Crumble' the land calls Sam who has deserted his family in order to become a top surfer. 'The thin ragged strip of land in the middle beckon[s] like a crooked dry finger ... asking Sam to come back and be a black man, as he should be. Beckoning and sighing for the sheep to come home.' (p. 121) Neglect of the family in order to succeed in the white world as in 'Going Home', 'Violet Crumble' or 'Fish and Chips' is always seen as a betrayal of responsibilities.

For some – not by any means all – of the repressed characters the natural world offers not only an environment in which white persecution is temporarily lessened, but one where Aboriginals can display skills and feel adequate to their environment and connected to their ancestry. Even at such times, though, white domination remains implicit in the background. The clearest example of this is in 'Cooley' when the hero goes to check his rabbit traps.

Cooley blended into the swirling shadows of the bush and the black cockatoo's cry echoed in his mind. Back, back to a thousand years ago when a wild, short full-blood had also fled silently into his sanctuary. Cooley's slouch and sullenness were gone, and a rare glint shone in his yellow, evasive eyes. Cooley was home. The wind that sang for him told him this, the leaves that brushed gently against his face told him; and Cooley was free, alone, a man again.

When he was here he could forget all about the troubles that fell upon his sloping shoulders. He could forget Packer with his red face and contemptuous blue eyes, he

could forget his lying, sneering brood. He could cease worrying about the insults heaped upon him by the white boys in class, or by his family at home. He could forget the teachers with their canes and detentions and more subtle insults. Now he was Yagan. Now he was Pigeon. Now he was king of the universe. (p. 180)

There are multiple identifications here, most obviously with the natural world which communicates with him, emancipates him and restores to him his sense of manliness. Not surprisingly this is accompanied by a sense of identification with an ancestral past and the ability to figure in the mind earlier presences in the terrain. But having established his identity in this way, the passage turns to his relations with the whites showing how constrained he still is. He tells himself that in this natural environment he can forget his white tormentors, and he identifies with some of the heroes of Aboriginal resistance. But ironically in naming them he is inscribing the presence of the whites, and so not really dismissing them at all. Whatever success Yagan and Pigeon had as guerrillas, they did not succeed in driving out the whites, and as talismans of Cooley's new-found independence they are ultimately illusions. Even Cooley's purpose there that day, capturing rabbits, an imported animal, shows how much he remains inside a white-constructed and dominated world.

The authorial voice in 'Saturday Night and Sunday Morning' makes a more mystical identification between the natural world and the Aboriginal Dreaming. Awareness of this identification, however, has been subverted by hatred in the time since the whites came.

His temper burns behind his sombre eyes while his teeth are a white slash across his dark face. Just like the Milky Way slashing across the sky, showing where his God has trodden in glory, even before white man was thought of. That is how old his people are. Timeless and never dying, like the land they are buried under. Then their bones became the trees and dancing rivers and folding mountains and their souls became the stars. They float to the end of time, yet are the beginning.

Except now his God is the steel and wooden shot-gun he points at the girl. He worships it with his whole hating spirit. (p. 54)

A similar correspondence between the stars and the Aboriginal ancestors is deftly sketched in at the end of 'One Hot Night' as Caesar is arrested. Again the stars have been displaced and rendered useless as sources of strength and as guides to conduct. 'The stars watch from above. His people. They can't help him now.' (p. 91) The stars have been replaced in these

stories by the city lights which are constantly seen as hard, hostile and empty, the deracinating parody of the ancestor symbols.

One way back from this twisted impasse of frustrated hate is through love. Several of the stories deal centrally with love, between whites, between Aboriginals, between Aboriginal men and white women. In the case of the last, the white woman is able to replace some of the defensive bitterness of the youth with a hopeful peace. In 'Saturday Night and Sunday Morning' this involves both a Pygmalion motif and an inversion of sexuality. Wolf, a wanted killer and now a kidnapper, records his sense of utter deprivation. '[Wolf is] a good name, unna, cos it all belongs to me, an' is all I got left.' (p. 59) His hostage responds to this *cri de coeur*, is able to communicate her sympathy and rekindles his belief in relationships with people other than hate. She is awed by the power she thus manifests:

She feels the power she has as she watches the happy brown youth. She created him from a heap of broken hopes and shattered laughter and rubbish. He is all her own, shaped from her hands and peacefulness. (p. 61)

This is not, however, the arrogant claim of a possessor but rather the concerned acknowledgement of responsibility for him. The giving and taking of names is often seen as paradigmatic of the appropriating and control of people. Thus in 'The Boxer' Clayton Little is renamed by the man who eventually comes to control utterly his boxing career and his life. In 'Saturday Night and Sunday Morning', however, Melanie offers her name in exchange for the explanation she had asked of his, and it serves as a token of equality and trust.

'Melanie, unna?'

He rolls the name around between his purple lips. When he speaks her name it is the same as his - a part of him that he can call his own. (p. 61)

The dissolution of power tensions – Melanie represents the macrocosmic dominant white power, but in the microcosm is herself a hostage of Wolf and his brother – is paralleled by a projected resolution of heterosexual tension. An aspect of deracinated Wolf is a brutal misogyny which arises from a fear of making himself too vulnerable. For the first time he trusts sufficiently to offer love, but that the offer is itself an acceptance is stressed by the inverted sexuality in which he envisions their embrace.

He had never really cared much for girls. Painted faces. Shrill, nagging voices. Giggling to annoy him. Crawling all over him, trying like the police to capture him. The police take away his freedom; the girls take away his soul. But his soul is all he has, so he belts the girls and makes them cry.

.....
That is what he needs most of all – love. To be able to lie beside her and feel her warm white body pulsating, full of life and kindness. Pumping her serenity into his wild brown body. Then he will have no need for anger any more. (pp. 62-63)

Instead of him penetrating her, she is to penetrate him and impregnate him with calm and serenity. The aggressiveness of his anger, displaced on to his male sexuality, is forsworn. With typical irony, however, no sooner is this position of genuine redemption arrived at than the police arrive and Wolf is killed.

Reg Cooley is less misogynist, but he is equally distrustful of getting close to people, and so has to be led to trust and love. Again the text is quite explicit both about the dissipation of his generalised anger and about the girl as maker of the new man.

The girl's pale fingers wiped away the last shards of hate and mistrust from his slanted, light eyes and her soft murmurs of passion wiped away his tension and hate so that the fortress he had built himself came crashing down and he stepped from the ruins like a prince freed from some evil spell.

.....
The girl's hands, as fragile and white as eggshells, had moulded him into a new being, a peaceful gentle being. (pp. 197-198)

Just as Melanie was envisioned as the sexual aggressor in the previous example so here Rachel is seen as the female knight liberating the imprisoned prince. Defined sex roles give way just as do racial prejudice and its consequent defensiveness.

Such moments of soul meeting soul, of respecting others for more than their prowess at fighting, are, however, bleakly rare in the stories. For the women there is little hope of any enduring fulfilment so sexual relations are declined or entered into on a principle of minimising the damage. Gentleness in men's lovemaking is regarded as exceptional. (pp. 79, 105) Even the more positively rendered relationships start out on a basis of minimal expectation. Thus, in 'One Hot Night' Lynette, aged fourteen, rapidly calculates the percentages of happiness. 'Soon, one day, a boy will grab her

and suck what he wants from her, then toss her away. She would rather it was this boy than any other.' (p. 81)

There can be little doubt about the power of Weller's depictions of urban and fringe Aboriginal life which have recently been credited with giving the 'best insight into contemporary Aboriginal views of authority, sexuality, humour and mores,'⁷ but equally there is little doubt that they are almost unrelievedly depressing. Weller's novel concluded with the violent death of the protagonist. Of the eight stories in *Going Home* only one, ('The Boxer'), is open-ended. Of the remaining seven, three culminate in violent death, one in alcoholic death, two in capture and jail, and one in the violent (and apparently permanent) rupture of a relationship.

The novel offsets its generally pessimistic action by endowing the characters with a certain energetic verve and capacity for life which made them in some sense dominant over their situation. The stories are more subtle and more relentless in their analysis of the omnipresent dominance of the whites, but in exploring that dominance Weller has toned down some of the raw, if self-destructive, energy. When the narrator of 'Fish and Chips' says at the end of a catalogue of violence, injustice, selfishness, alcoholism, criminality and jail,

Well, now we've got some money and there's a programme about Charlie Pride on the radio. Everyone is happy and there's a good movie on TV.

Tomorrow there'll be fish and chips for tea.

That'll do me. (p. 135)

this reader is less aware of a sense of tenacious and resilient vitality than of the depressingly low expectations of the speaker.

So effectively has Weller teased out the physical and psychological implications of white hegemony under which his characters suffer that he risks compromising the power of his texts for political intervention. If the characters can no longer offer themselves to black readers as models either of resistance or of achievement, and if they are portrayed as too completely powerless and passive to engage the sympathies of white readers then Weller's triumphant realism will have taken him to an impasse.

There are, however, more optimistic scenarios. Colin Johnson, in his second novel, *Long Live Sandawara*, solved a less acute form of this problem by alternating his realistic urban scenes with a non-realistic and highly

rhetorical evocation of militant Aboriginal history. Other writers such as Kath Walker and Jack Davis have contrasted the present-day dispossession with favourable representations of traditional Aboriginal life to imply a residual strength and a way back. Weller has made some use of both these strategies within his predominantly realistic fiction and no doubt can exploit them further. But he has a further option, for perhaps more than any other of the Aboriginal writers in English he has explored the power of language itself for subversion and redirection of values. Refashioning his medium offers a way of avoiding the paralysis towards which his social analysis seems to lead. In Weller's hands, the dog will not only again have its day, but find a voice – and a home.

NOTES

1. Archie Weller, *The Day of the Dog* (Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 1981); *Going Home: Stories* (Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 1986). Page references are to this edition.
2. 'Johnny Blue' tells of a white who befriends the Aboriginals at his school. 'Saturday Night and Sunday Morning' and 'Cooley' both include episodes where white girls and black youths overcome their racial prejudice.
3. See, for example, pp. 3, 11, 33, 39, 59, 68, 74, 90, 128, 168, 209, 210.
4. Darcy's action here can be related to subversion through mimicry which has a long history in Aboriginal-white and in slave-master relations. Cooley entertains Rachel with this mimicry of Packer, a talent he has 'inherited from his mother's people'. (p. 184) Cf. also J.J. Healy, *Literature and the Aborigines in Australia* (St. Lucia, U of Queensland Press, 1978), pp. 8-10.
5. There is a potent if rather blurry nexus of ideas coming from the nineteenth century which links guerrilla-like reprisals by the Aboriginals to treachery and cowardice and images these in the secretive hunting of dingoes and the cringing of a maltreated dog. Cf. for example: 'It is generally the women who suffer [in tribal payback killings]: the men being too cowardly, unless under the influence of very strong passion, to attack those of equal strength with themselves.' E.W. Landor, *The Bushman: Or Life in a New Country* (London, Richard Bentley, 1847), p. 214; 'Ingratitude is innate with them, and they drink in treachery from the breast.' Charles H. Eden, *My Wife and I in Queensland; An Eight Years' Experience in the Above Colony with Some Account of Polynesian Labour* (London, Longmans Green & Co, 1872), p. 108. Warrigal, the Aboriginal character in Boldrewood's *Robbery Under Arms* (1882-83) is the most famous example in nineteenth century Australian fiction. He is, however, figured as a blend of domestic and native dog. His name, his treachery and his ability to move through the country undetected indicate the dingo; his 'pluck', his utter devotion to Starlight and his willingness to submit to abuse from him indicate the domestic dog.

6. In Achebe's *Arrow of God* (London, Heinemann, 1964), a young British administrator is perplexed at how to justify imprisoning Ezeulu simply because the latter declined to participate in the Administration's scheme of appointing Paramount Chiefs. The solution comes as a form of words from his superior: 'refusing to cooperate with the Administration' (p. 218), and he mentally applauds verbal skill that permits such realignment of moral authority behind political expediency.
7. Jack Davis and Adam Shoemaker, 'Aboriginal Literature: Written', *Australian Literary Studies*, 14, 3 (October 1988), 43.