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# An Interview with Dr. Hsu-Ming Teo

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HSU-MING TEO was born in Malaysia in 1970 and emigrated with her parents to Castle Hill, Sydney, in 1977. She began studying medicine, but changed to arts in her second year of university. After completing a Ph.D. at the University of Sydney in 1998, she taught postcolonial studies at the University of Southern Denmark. She is now a research fellow at the Department of Modern History at Macquarie University. A cultural historian and novelist, she works in the area of twentieth-century European history, British imperial culture, travel and tourism, and popular literature. She is the co-editor of *Cultural History in Australia* (UNSW Press 2003). In 1999, she won The Australian/Vogel Literary Award for her first novel *Love and Vertigo*, which was also short-listed for the inaugural Tasmania Pacific Region Literary Prize and the Dobbie Award for women's fiction. It has been translated into German, Italian, Chinese, and Thai. Her second novel, *Behind the Moon*, was published in 2005 and short-listed for one of the 2006 NSW Premier's Literary Awards. She was a member of the NSW Premier's Literature and History committee in 2004, one of the judges of the 2007 NSW Premier's Literary Awards, and was on the advisory council of the 2007 Man Asian Literary Prize. She is currently serving as one of the editorial board members of the *Journal of Australian Studies*.

Alison Broinowski (AB): A connecting thread of fear has been detected in your fiction. The June 2009 special issue of *Antipodes* featured several essays that discussed your work. Would you agree with that?

Teo Hsu-Ming (THM): It's hard to reduce any novel down to one thing, but fear is definitely a significant part of *Love and Vertigo*, and especially in *Behind the Moon*. The section of the *Antipodes* article that quoted views about [fear in] Australian society, much of that is generated by the tabloids, by current affairs television. All of that comes through in the novel but ultimately it goes beyond Australian society. It's about the human condition, the fear of being alone, the fear of loneliness, and not being able to connect. Now this I think is the great modernist fear. We have for instance E. M. Forster's great epigraph in *Howard's End*—"only connect"—and the whole history of modernist literature has been about the fear that we are no longer able to connect.

AB: In *Behind the Moon*, *Linh*, a Vietnamese boat person, had as her greatest fear the dread of being raped or drowned, and afterwards she relived it in her sleep every night. But quite soon in her Australian experience, that fear was displaced, wasn't it, by the fear of not belonging or fear of being alone?

THM: I don't know that it was displaced quite soon for her, but I think her fears were tangible and were fears that could be overcome, [though] not easily. The issue of survival was fundamental. Now you come to the society to which she migrates, and the fears became quite intangible. How do you overcome a fear that is just suggested but may or may not actually be real? That haunts the imagination far more. It's not better or worse than actual fears, but survival is quite different from happiness.

AB: She's surrounded by people who all have fears of their own, a lot of them similar and some different. Could you talk about them?

THM: I think a lot of it was about the fear of not belonging to a community, whichever community that was. Now, that doesn't necessarily have to be the community of the nation, it could just be friendship or family. So for example the gay Asian guy, Justin, whose parents are from Singapore, his fears are not necessarily of not belonging to the nation. As one of his best friends, Gibbo, says, Justin looks as if he quintessentially belongs—"he is very good at sports." And he

seems assimilated, but it is his gayness, and particularly his gay Asianness, which marks him out as a misfit, both in the gay community and in the Asian community.

AB: *And then when he goes to Malaysia, he's not Asian enough, is he?*

THM: No, and what's interesting is that he has imbibed fears about racism. So often in Australian discourse, racism is ethnic or black versus white, or white racism against ethnic or black. But racism is not that easy a dichotomy or category; it's a [national] discourse that can creep into people, too. So Justin, who has been the victim of racism in Australia—the Adelaide incident on the tram, for instance—when he goes to Malaysia, finds an attitude of cultural superiority inside of him: how dare a Malaysian criticize him, an Australian? And there he is identifying completely with the nation and all the discourses of White Australian nationhood.

AB: *I am always pleased, given that White Australia is bad enough, to find, for instance in Malaysian or Singaporean writing, any admission that racism exists elsewhere, too.*

THM: I find it irritating and frustrating, particularly since my parents came to Australia as migrants—my mother was from Singapore, my father from Malaysia. One of the main reasons why they chose to migrate was the May 1969 riots and the discriminatory policies against Chinese and Indians in Malaysia, particularly in terms of education, which are still in place today, I believe. I have lots of anecdotes of racist attitudes among my extended family members as well, and there are all kinds of racial or ethnic problems within Indonesia and all over the place. Then you get a figure like Pauline Hanson, who is disreputable, who is very problematic and you have all these Asian nations turning around and saying, “Well, there you go, all of you are racists.” Without recognizing the fact that for people, particularly from middle-class backgrounds, who migrate to Australia, problems of racism are not nearly as bad as in the countries from which they came.

AB: *Looking at it from several sides, as you do, gives you opportunities for some interesting takes on that. For instance, Gibbo's mother is so anxious not to appear racist that she overcompensates, which is wince making.*

THM: There's a way in which her good intentions should be honored, but what she is doing is, again, still placing race at the center of what is going on.

AB: *Each of your non-central characters has got a particular fear, too. Dirk, for instance, Justin's lover, while he seems to be a very secure man, very much in control, is fearful, too, of being alone.*

THM: I think that's the fundamental fear of every single character in the novel, this fear of being alone, the fear that nobody is going to be there for you, or that people's lives only overlap with yours for a limited period of time. And that relationships are not particularly strong or secure. But in that sense for me the ending is a positive one: it takes a tragedy to

bring them together, but they do find that the community is there and that the bonds they have built are strong enough to sustain them, that they are really not alone. Now, it's never going to be that very romantic sense of completion, that whoever you are with, whether it's a friend, a lover, a father, or a family member, is enough to complete what is lacking in the individual. But I think Gibbo works this through at the end as well, that people are not there to complete him but they are there to offer whatever they can, and that really is enough.

AB: *That's a much more positive conclusion that you reach there than you did in Love and Vertigo. Could you talk a little bit more about Pandora and her problems?*

THM: The thing about Pandora is her problems were not merely of migration, or racism, or anything; it was really the family that was very claustrophobic. It is centripetal as well, but everything turns in on the family again, and it's that brokenness at the heart of the family which makes them unable to reach out and construct positive relationships. Sunny manages to break away at the end, but all the problems inherent in the family were generational as well as cultural problems, and they existed before migration. The process of migration really just exacerbates those problems.

AB: *Of course, because the family was more alone than it would have been in its first culture.*

THM: And it had all of these stresses and tensions that accompany migration. The trajectory of *Love and Vertigo* is a kind of J-shape: you've got this family sliding down, and the novel ends just as it is about to turn upwards for the better. But there have been so many things going wrong that, structurally and in terms of the plot, you can't have a couple of chapters at the end resolving everything and then they lived happily ever after. So where Grace is reconciled with her father, and has resolved her problems with her mother, at that turning point the novel ends.

AB: *The other thing that all of your characters are searching for, and some do find it, is what I call a “redeeming person,” a school friend, Grace's friend, a friend upon whom too much is loaded to be a redeeming person, but sometimes that person is a good-hearted soul who turns out to save someone from real panic. That happens in both books, doesn't it?*

THM: I think they are all looking for a Hermaphroditus figure, a figure of connection.

AB: *I see, to fit the two halves together in a sense.*

THM: Yes.

AB: *Do you think that, in their aloneness, or their fear of it, narcissism comes into it?*

THM: Oh definitely.

AB: *It struck me that narcissism is another way of describing fear, fear of loneliness. It's also that the person is concentrating excessively on what's going on inside themselves. Poor Gibbo, for example, when he stalks Linh, is a classic example of that. She has*

been like a redeeming person for him, he thought, for a moment, but all she was being was ordinarily kind. And then he latches on to her. So is this narcissism, do you think, as much as fear, or as a reverse side of fear?

THM: Yes. Narcissism is one of the hallmarks of our age, and it's an offshoot of individualism as well. I mean, it definitely is a Catch 22 situation, as far as narcissism is concerned, because it's all about *me*, and what can people do for *me*, and how are people going to complete me, and make me happy. But I am at the center of everything, and then the fear comes, because people can't meet my needs, people can't do this for me, so I'm going to be alone, but it was because I expected and wanted people to complete me, to make me happy and all of that.

AB: *While what I call the "settler Australian" characters in your fiction have very real fears of their own, like everybody else, the Asian characters, it seems to me, are more exposed to the kind of fear that you've just been describing, because of the migration experience or their parents' migration experience. This would be in part because they have left behind extended families and networks in the hope of a better life, but actually without even thinking what life would be without those, until the migration experience hits. Is that right?*

THM: I don't know that it's true for *Love and Vertigo*, where the family is dysfunctional already and are people to escape from [to something less fearful]. Family dynamics are always very complicated and ambivalent; the family provides identity in terms of culture, but it's also stifling. If the fears that I have described in discussing narcissism are particularly characteristic of the Asian figures, perhaps that is because coming to terms with individualism is still relatively new.

AB: *As a comment of my own, I must say that the emphasis placed on Western individualism in the [Asian] countries where I've lived has always seemed to me to a bit false: it may describe America, I don't know, but I don't think it describes Australia as much as Mahathir and Lee and others would make out. They would always say, "Oh you Westerners, you're all about the individual." I don't think we are, actually, or not to the extent that they would like to believe. But then they have a political agenda; they want the family to be the building block of society because they don't want to pay for social services [or be challenged about individual human rights]. Am I right?*

THM: I am firmly on the side of the individual. When people like that talk, the *we* that they talk about in terms of Asianness and ethnicity—and this is also a problem for multiculturalist politics in Australia—the *we* is exclusive and coercive. Not just *we* the mainstream, but *we* the Chinese Asian middle-class male. So I am reading the article in *Antipodes*, and some other authors, particularly Ouyang Yu whose work I like very much, and I think he's able to write (what he does about China as the desirable homeland and being an Alien Australian) because he is male. I read all this stuff and I think: is this my fear? Well, no, it's not just a fear of not belonging to Australia, it is a fear that the traditional patriarchal culture from which I

come is going to swallow me up again. To give you an example of this: when I was doing the research for *Behind the Moon* I had quite a lot of interaction with the Vietnamese community. I went to a lunch out at Cabramatta and there were a lot of leaders from the Vietnamese community but also from various dialect groups in the Chinese community as well, for instance the Teochew community. And I'm not received too badly [by all these men] because I am an exception anyway, being an academic and I'm a writer; so although I'm a female, when I am meeting these people that sort of overcomes the fact that I am female. But when I am sitting down to a yum cha lunch then it's "Why don't you order for us? A Chinese daughter would order for us."

It [the fact that I am female] completely overrides [everything else]. I am Chinese, so this whole idea of being very respectful to my elders is ingrained, so I am trying to be respectful to this Chinese man who I feel has been very deeply insulting in the way he's treating me. I just said to him, "I don't know what you like and I'm not your daughter." And it gets worse from there: the questions, "Why aren't you married yet?" and "What do your parents think?" They wouldn't ask these questions of a male.

AB: *Does the expression "It's none of your business" ever occur?*

THM: Yes it does, very frequently. But when I was reading the *Antipodes* article I was thinking, if there is a fear, it's not drawn just along ethnic lines, it's not Australia and UnAustralia, it is the fear that the individual will be subsumed by the traditional, conservative ethnic community that tries to promote its own agenda, to keep its own power and the power of community leaders, and to co-opt younger members back into that system of values in which I as a woman am made powerless.

AB: *Yasmine Gooneratne has suggested the same sort of thing in relation to the Sri Lankan community. She satirizes it, about the people who refuse to make any adaptation to Australia but insist on being more Sri Lankan than in Sri Lanka and co-opting others to be the same in the name of keeping their culture alive, but actually empowering themselves. She laughs at it and walks away from it.*

THM: Yes. But it is here that the secular Australian state is like the protector.

AB: *I see what you mean. And to the extent that the Australian state offers opportunities for anybody for people like you, obviously, to succeed, but also for the people in your books, who do all kinds of different things, that is their way out of the race-based cocoon. But it comes with pitfalls, frightening ones, as you've suggested. For someone with uncertainty in their life, the question is likely to arise, in the situation you've described, of self-doubt. Why didn't I behave better with that person? Am I so awful?*

THM: When you grow up as a Chinese daughter, you grow up with a lot of guilt.

AB: *As Ouyang Yu says, "Once a Chinese, always half a Chinese."*

THM: But I think growing old is wonderful. The older I get, the less I feel I have to tolerate that sort of thing. It is a kind of bullying.

AB: *It's bullying, and you don't have to put up with that. You know how to tell him where to go. And settler Australian society is not without its bullies: I mean Bob Gibson in your book [Behind the Moon] is a classic, and he just needs someone to stand up to him, not in the way his wife does, but to make him think. I mean, what an idiot!*

THM: Yes, but he is reacting out of fear, that the way Australia has changed means he doesn't belong here any more. I had a lot of neighbors like that, growing up. I had moved away by the time [Pauline] Hanson came on, but even then they were "There are too many migrants here but you're all right." Or, "I'm not a racist but . . ." But I'm not happy with how the liberal left has dealt with the discourse of racism because it's been too absolute as far as I can see. That's why I deal with these things as a novelist rather than as an academic, because people are much more complicated than that. I grew up next to neighbors who could make really racist comments. I had an ice-skating instructor like that once, who would say all of these things but who would be personally very nice to me, and say, "Oh it's not you of course, dear." Now, you could write them all off as racists, and I feel that's what the leftist discourse of racism does, and it's ultimately not very helpful. Because there is more to people than that, and racism functions in a much more complicated way. There is a place for people with good intentions who can treat others better on an individual level even if they don't have the right words and their attitudes are not the right attitudes.

AB: *So when they are pushed into a situation that they feel is demeaning or discriminatory against them, like Hanson, then they lash out in inappropriate ways.*

THM: Yes, and my brother's best school friend's father, on whom I based Bob, was very much that sort of person, very rough and very White Australian, and a Hanson supporter as well, and unashamed of it. But he was very kind, and you see that kind of contradiction with Bruce Ruxton [ex-President of the Returned Services League] as well: they can say all these kinds of things and then he has, what is it, a Japanese goddaughter? So that's the kind of contradiction that interests me as a novelist, and the complexities and realities of life, but they don't fall neatly into academic discourse about race, which I find quite frustrating.

AB: *So you're happy to divide your professional life, your teaching of academic history and your fiction writing. How do you manage to do that?*

THM: Not very well, I'm afraid. I've got another novel but I'm trying to finish off my academic monograph at the moment, and you know what it's like at this university [Macquarie].

AB: *A little while ago V. S. Naipaul and Arundathi Roy both made statements to the effect that neither of them was going to write fiction any longer because the world was too full of serious*

*problems for that, and they would have to devote their energy to serious things. Have you felt that, in the sense that recent events are so fear inducing, like terrorism, climate change, food shortage, energy costs, and all the dreadful things facing the world? Do you feel at all that these are such fearful things that writing about them in fiction is no longer appropriate? You're not writing about them, but [do you feel that] writing fiction in such a world is no longer a tenable thing to do?*

THM: No, I think the worse the world gets the more it needs fiction.

AB: *And why is that? Now I'm talking from the point of view of your consumers, your readers.*

THM: Many different reasons. One of them is sheer escapism, and there's nothing wrong with that. Another is fun, which is the same thing. And pleasure: the pleasures of reading a good book, the pleasures of narrative. All of those are perfectly valid. How could you live and continue to be human if all that was ever on your mind was fear? Fiction gives me the resources, and I think many readers, the resources to go on being human. I always love the anecdote that Hugh Grant told after the Divine Brown incident, when some American talk-show host asked if he was going to get therapy, and he said, "No, we're English, and so we read." And I think reading is therapy, it is a means of survival, and the novel is not just merely utilitarian, I completely reject that view. Also I think, to use a historical metaphor—do you know the work of Fernand Braudel, the *Longue Durée*?—literature is the *longue durée* and terrorism, global warming, and all that are the *événements*, the little things of the moment on the top, while literature looks at the longer, deeper structures, of what it means to be human. And if you are just going to focus on the events of the day, well, that's current affairs, and it could be a really good novel, but not necessarily so.

AB: *One of the things that comforts some of your characters, I think, is the sense that other people are as fearful as they are. Is it the knowledge that some depressed people come to, that they are not alone, even though their depression seems to be this terrible thing that has happened to them and them only? In numerous instances the people in your books realize that others are having the same experiences as they are. Or that what is happening to them is not necessarily directed at them: for instance, when Tien realizes it wasn't that Jason didn't love her, it's just that he was gay. And that helped her, didn't it?*

THM: Yes, it did, and I guess this suffocating wall of narcissism is broken through, for the first time, so it's not just about me; it is, oh, this is how it is from someone else's point of view. Because the act of empathizing is something that breaks through this narcissism that keeps them alone in the first place.

AB: *Coming back to dreadful events in the world, I notice that you very cleverly weave real events into the book—the Strathfield shooting, for instance. I thought that was terrific because it grounds you in real events, the événements, so that you're not ignoring the*

*dreadful things that happen, or making up fictional ones, but using the real ones. It seemed to me to be a way of relating your fiction to those events, without letting it seem, as V. S. Naipaul thought, "mere" fiction. I'm not meaning to insult your work by saying that, I think it's really a strength.*

THM: I'll never be insulted by having my work termed "mere" fiction.

AB: *Is that a deliberate strategy, or is it something that you just like to do?*

THM: I suppose that because I'm a historian, that's one of the reasons, but also another is to look at the way history affects ordinary people, because we live in an age of heightened historical consciousness. Now we want to be there at history-making events, like Diana's funeral, and see history in the making. I wasn't there at the Strathfield massacre, I came a little after. I left the Plaza and went home, realized I had forgotten something, and then went back, and the massacre happened in that time [that I was not there]. Strathfield at that time was a lot smaller, it was more of a community then. But the other thing was to look at how history then affects people. For Justin, all these terrible things happened, but with the self-centeredness of youth, it all becomes about him and his sexual experience, the moment when he loses his virginity. That's not necessarily a bad thing, but it's an interesting way of looking at the individual within historical circumstances.

AB: *Why do you think it is that women seem to be the main authors these days, and have been for more than a decade, of what I call Asian/Australian fiction? Not many men are doing it: Brian Castro, Christopher Cyrill, Ouyang and so on, but it's predominantly a female industry. Why do you think that is?*

THM: It's really interesting, because it's not just here, of course. America as well. This is completely speculating, because I haven't really thought about this much before, but maybe for the first time Asian women, or women coming out of an Asian culture, are writing out of anger, but they also have the freedom to write.

AB: *Do you feel completely free in Australia to write whatever you like? Or do you feel some constraint of any kind, either from within or without?*

THM: No, definitely not. Eleven years ago, I didn't write for anybody else, I wrote for myself. It was an accident that it was published. I used the Vogel deadline, because I like to work to deadlines, I can't get stuff done otherwise, and so I finished the manuscript and I just sent it in.

AB: *You must have been thrilled when you got it [the Vogel Young Writer's Prize].*

THM: I was stunned, I was shocked, and very insecure, as well.

AB: *Was your insecurity not, as many people have said, the challenge of writing the next one then?*

THM: Yes, but also because I'm trained as a historian, I have never done fiction. In fact, after I'd won the Vogel I started looking up all these creative writing schools, because I thought I should really go and learn how to do this properly.

AB: *[Senator] Carmen Lawrence gave a lecture in 2005 for the Freilich Foundation, and she wrote a book at the same time, called Fear and Politics. In the lecture and the book, she was arguing that fear is a crucial factor in Australian public policy. Of course, she was writing [about Australia] under Howard. I am wondering whether you think that is something that's confined to Australian public policy or whether it's a more pervasive thing. Your characters are obviously reflecting what goes on in Australia; they're all fearful, in one way or another; and fear has certainly become more prominent in Australian public life. What do you think?*

THM: I think it's more pervasive; I think it's universal, and almost ahistorical. I mean, you look at *The Book of Job*—"the thing I feared has come upon me," he said. Michael Moore also argues that fear is what is driving America, in *Bowling for Columbine*, and whether people agree or disagree, that's one of his theses.

AB: *And he argues that the Canadians, on the other hand, are not afraid of their neighbors, or not to the same extent.*

THM: Yes. So it definitely is more pervasive. I think it gets really dangerous when too much fear is fostered within a society. But not just that. Thinking about the whole concept of UnAustralia, when I read that article [in *Antipodes*], I thought, that is just so right, I completely agree with what it says from a literary point of view, and from the point of view of personal experience in many ways. But I didn't know whether it was politically strategic because the whole concept of UnAustralia is based on fear and exclusion. Maybe this is on my mind because I'm putting together a Master's unit on Weimar and Nazi Germany at the moment, but I think if everyone on the left is always pointing to all the things to be afraid of, from the Howard government, or the Rudd government or whatever, that is not a particularly healthy thing as well. Because one of the things that undermined the Weimar government was that, although there was revolution and reform, it didn't go far enough and there were a whole bunch of disappointed writers and artists and so forth who didn't support the democracy that they had because it wasn't good enough.

AB: *Some people would say that one of the strengths of European writers and artists and intellectuals generally has been their refusal to compromise with power, no matter who wields it. And their dedicated lifelong task of being dissatisfied, being outsiders, being critics.*

THM: Well, that's really nice for a writer. It's such a romantic and satisfying position to be in. But the duty of the citizen goes beyond that as well. Not that the government or the society should not be criticized, but that it [criticism] should be balanced with all the things that are right with it [the society] and where we want to reinforce what is right, then to

go further beyond that, because a society which doesn't have affirmation is a society which is on very shaky ground. And it's also a society in which you cede nationalism and all of those feelings which are the religion of the modern age over to the conservatives and the right wing.

AB: Do you think another response to that fearfulness, created as it might be by politicians, but fed into by people, is what I call the "gated community," the idea that people surround themselves with familiar people like themselves, put a wall around it of whatever kind—it might be a monetary wall, or a qualification wall, or an identity wall—and then sit inside there, in their own society or in their own country?—clinging to notions of likeness which, I would suggest, actually make them more fearful of what's outside.

THM: I'd say it depends on their socio-economic position. I like the idea of these gated communities, but I don't think the gate is completely shut. [I like it] in terms of describing what's going on here and this desire to form safe communities and communities of the like-minded. Academics do that all the time; that is a very human response, but the responsibility of academics is to be aware of that and to be aware that you don't get intellectual growth without engaging with the other.

AB: And it's the responsibility of writers, too, don't you think? Apart from writing say *La Bohème*, which is confined to a very incestuous stifling world within bohemia, very charming and fascinating for the rest of us to look in upon, but it is limited, it can go just so far. After a while, don't you think, you have to do a *George Orwell* and get out among the *Burmese*, or the *Spanish civil war*, or go somewhere different, don't you?

THM: Or among people who support *Pauline Hanson*, or white racism, and all of that, to find the common humanity. That is the job of the novelist.

AB: Yes, that too. Well of course, this is why I specialize in *Asian Australian fiction*, it gives us another take on our society. That's why I like it. I would be bored to death just reading the *Great Australian Novel*. I loved *Patrick White* because he showed us another *Australia*, one that hadn't been written about. He listened to people talking on buses, and wrote that down.

THM: As do I. I agree, but coming back to your idea about the gated community and why I said the boundaries are porous, they're not as sealed off as we might imagine. With regard to race, there's a considerable shifting of migrants, particularly middle-class ones, with regard to how they position themselves through ethnicity and later on through class and socio-economic mobility; that allows them to get through the gates to where they want to be.

*Teo Hsu-ming concluded our interview—after I ran out of tape—by reflecting on the popular reception of Love and Vertigo, which was better than Behind the Moon, perhaps because of the Vogel prize, and it had more success at writers' festivals, where Behind the Moon had been less noticed. She speculated on the apparent decline of interest in Asian Australian writing during the Howard decade, and whether that might now be reversed. She repeated her view that fiction reveals a deeper culture than politics, and that Australia's national story had yet to be told in fiction. Novelists, she said, could present Australians with an alternative story located within a larger international story about the struggle for human rights, for instance. She added:*

THM: It's extremely important for all citizens, regardless of profession, to participate in the political process and to feel as though they have a stake in the nation. Any democracy is only as strong as the committed participation of informed citizens to the good of the people. This is what is so exciting about *Rudd's 2020 summit*: the inclusive invitation to citizens to participate in nation building. One of the problems of the *Weimar republic* was the utter disengagement of artists from politics, especially in the *neuesachlichkeit* movement; so it's vital that the 4As continue to be heard. At the most despairing moments in the *Howard years* (from the Left's perspective, of course), especially before federal elections, the denunciations of *Howard* from the 4As had become so desperate and shrill that they were probably counter-productive among swing voters, especially since the *Howard government* had deceitfully but successfully branded artists and authors—many of whom subsist on very low incomes!—as being "elitist" and therefore out of touch with "ordinary Australians." You know how people are about "ordinary Australians" ("battlers," "working families," etc.), and how hostile they are towards intellectuals, in this country! *Howard* deliberately fanned the flames of hostility towards artists and intellectuals in the general community, but *Rudd* has done exactly the opposite in being inclusive and legitimating the voice of intellectuals once more. If you want a speculation, here's one: leaving aside the fortunes of *Asian Australian authors*, I think that the next few years under a government that respects the arts and values its intellectuals may see a renaissance in the international success of *Australian film, arts, literature, and scholarship* because these sections of *Australian society* are no longer living in *UnAustralia*. Consider the federal governments under which the majority of the films we now think of as "classic Australian," and which enjoyed wide international success, were made. Anyway, here's cautious optimism for you. □

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ALISON BROINOWSKI received her doctorate for a study of representations of Australia in ten Asian countries. Formerly an Australian diplomat, she has worked for over twenty years on mutual images of Australia and Asian countries, as reflected in public discourse, in literature, and in the arts. Her *Asia/Australia* monographs include *The Yellow Lady: Australian Impressions of Asia* (OUP 1992, 1996) and *About Face: Asian Accounts of Australia* (Scribe 2003). Her critiques of Australian foreign policy include *Howard's War* (Scribe 2003) and *Allied and Addicted* (Scribe 2007).

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