



Foiled!

the truth and the hoax - the hoax and the truth

1st April, 2005
La Trobe University City Campus,
215 Franklin St, Melbourne. VIC 3000

Program Details

Keynote Address - 9:45am -10:45am

Dr Jane Roscoe

The consequences of faking it

Contemporary culture is littered with fakes, hoaxes and frauds. We find ourselves asking 'what can we believe?' and 'who can we believe?'. Some of these instances are intentional, designed to fool us, some are unintentional, testimonies to the power of social codes and norms. Whether intentional or not, such examples raise issues about truth, representation and audience. This paper will discuss an unintentional hoax, *Forgotten Silver*, (Peter Jackson and Costa Botes, NZ, 1995) and use it to explore the consequences of faking it.

Jane Roscoe has recently taken up the position of Programming Executive at SBS Television after heading the Centre for Screen Studies and Research at AFTRS for three years. She has previously taught screen studies at universities in the UK, New Zealand and Australia. She has published extensively in the areas of documentary, reality TV, audiences and mock-documentary. She is author of *Documentary in New Zealand* (Dunmore Press, 1999), and co-author of *Faking It: Mock documentary and the subversion of factuality* (Manchester University Press, 2001).

Session One- 11:00am - 12:45am

Richard Evans

The Rothbury Shootings, 1929: Myth, counter-myth and a search for the truth

At dawn on 16 December 1929, police fired on picketing miners at a colliery near Rothbury, in northern New South Wales. One miner, Norman Brown, was killed, and ten others were seriously injured. The Rothbury tragedy has been woven into labour folklore and history, and also – in a very different light – into the history of Australian policing. The shootings also became part of the personal legend of an officer who later became Commissioner of the New South Wales police, William John MacKay. All of these received versions of the Rothbury incident are, however, farcically inaccurate. This paper peels back the layers of myth surrounding what happened at Rothbury, and discusses why, sometimes, no one wants to know what really happened . . .

Richard Evans is a Melbourne writer and historian. He has worked as a journalist on newspapers and legal magazines, and was a lecturer in Journalism at RMIT. He is the author of *Lawful Expression* (Lawpress, 1998) and *The Pyjama Girl Mystery: A true story of murder, obsession and lies* (Scribe, 2004). He is completing a PhD in history at Monash University.

Cassandra Atherton

Fuck All Editors: The Ern Malley Hoax and the *Bulletin* Scandal

James McAuley, Harold Stewart and Gwen Harwood are important figures in Australian literature for their ability to hoax the Australian press and the Australian public. Both the Ern Malley hoax and the *Bulletin* scandal raised questions about the craftsmanship of Australian poetry and the gullibility of the editor. McAuley, Stewart and Harwood firmly believed that there was an obvious decline in the standards of Australian poetry and that inferior literature was being published by editors who were unable to judge poetry. They set out to expose this by writing poetry that they considered badly crafted and getting these poems published in revered journals/papers. To do this they chose to write under the pseudonyms Ern Malley and Walter Lehmann respectively. I will argue that pseudonyms are much more than publicity ploys, they reveal complex psychological beings who consciously employed subpersonalities to explore a range of issues not acceptable to their respectable public personae.

Cassandra Atherton is a Melbourne writer and choreographer who currently lectures in poetry at The University of Melbourne. She completed her PhD on Gwen Harwood's pseudonymous poetry and has written articles on Chris Wallace-Crabbe's recent poetry. Recipient of the Felix Meyer award, she travelled to Japan to research the floating world for her second novel.

Anna Branford

The Cottingley Fairies: children, trickery and truth

This paper considers what is often referred to as the greatest hoax of all time. This is the 1917 case of the Cottingley Fairies, in which two young girls in Yorkshire, England, appeared to be offering photographic evidence of the existence of fairies. It will explore some possible explanations, not only for the acceptance of the 'evidence', but for the considerable impact the photographs made during the war period in which they emerged

Anna Branford is a PhD student in the sociology department at La Trobe University. Her current research is in children and fantasy narrative.

Session Two - 1:15pm - 3:15pm

Fact or Fiction? (50-60 minute panel session)

A panel of writers will read a short piece of prose. Conference participants will be asked to consider their reaction to the work. Was it fact or fiction?

After all of the writers have read they will be asked to reveal the intention (truth) behind the work. Participants will then share their responses in a facilitated discussion about fact and fiction.

Writers:

Richard Freadman, Sally Morrison, Catherine Padmore, Janey Runci

Facilitator:

Kay Torney Souter

PANEL MEMBERS:

Professor Richard Freadman is Professor of English and Director of the Unit for Studies in Biography and Autobiography at La Trobe University. His most recent books are *Threads of Life: Autobiography and the Will* (Chicago, 2001), and a memoir, *Shadow of Doubt: My Father and Myself* (Bystander, 2003). He is currently writing a study of Australian Jewish autobiography.

Sally Morrison

Before she started writing full time in 1990, Sally Morrison spent eighteen years as a research scientist at the University of Melbourne. With Literature Board assistance between

1990 and 1993, she wrote the novel *Mad Meg*, a tale of art, artists and politics set in Melbourne, Paris and Milan. *Mad Meg* is the name of a fictional art gallery and a painting by Brueghel; the book won the 1995 National Book Council's Banjo award for fiction. Since *Mad Meg* Morrison has written *Against Gravity*, a tale of science, scientists and religion, set in a not-so-very fictional university in Melbourne. Following *Against Gravity* came *The Insatiable Desire of Injured Love*, a tale of love and lovers told from a not-very-fictional hospital bed. Currently she is writing the biography of not-at-all fictional artist Clifton Pugh. She lives with her hundred and thirty kilogram partner in a small house in Richmond and is RH positive, a thing which sent her 94 year old mother to bed for three days with a queasy tummy, believing it meant she has AIDS. These are the facts.

Dr Catherine Padmore lectures in the English program at La Trobe University. *Sibyl's Cave*, the novel written as part of her creative writing PhD, was published by Allen and Unwin in 2004 and was short-listed for both *The Australian/Vogel Award* and in the first book category of the Commonwealth Writers' Prize (South East Asia and South Pacific region).

Janey Runci is a fiction writer living in Maldon. She has had a number of short stories published in *Meanjin*, *Fine Line*, *Australasian Post* and an anthology, *Red Hot Notes*. In 2004 she won Second Prize in the British Competition, the Bridport Prize.

Amanda Vega

'The greatest realism is also the greatest fakery': The Fictional Biography of Thomas Chatterton

This presentation will consider the possibilities for, and difficulties of, representing the self from the past, through the genre of fictional biography. While texts dealing with the intersections between fiction and biography have been written since history separated from the newly emergent novel in the 18th century, I would like to suggest that contemporary fictional biographies present a unique challenge to the possibilities of representing the self from the past. Questions about knowing the past, and in relation to biography, of 'recovering' historical personages, inevitably encounter questions about truth and authenticity – how can we gain accurate knowledge of historical personages? Is any one depiction of a life and death more obviously 'true' than any other? If so, in what elements of a text can we discern this truth? Does it make a difference if we attempt to learn the 'truth' through biography rather than through the novel?

These questions are giddily played out in Peter Ackroyd's novel *Chatterton*, which follows the (fictionalised) biographical search for the eighteenth century poet and notorious plagiarist, Thomas Chatterton. The novel weaves truth with forgery, mimicry and augmentations, and suggests that plagiarism may allow the greatest access to the truth of the self from the past.

Amanda Vega is a PhD candidate in the Literature, Screen and Theatre Studies program at the Australian National University. She is interested in fictional biographies and autobiographies that have been published since the rise of the postmodern paradigm in the 1960s to today, and is examining the various strategies these novels display for representing the self from the past.

Di Ball

Tales from the BallPark

We are all the sum of our parts, and while documenting and recording my activities, I began to name these selves. They included myself as Di Ball, as a Cuntry and Western performer Fleur Ball, as Beach Ball, Meet Ball, Glo Ball, Polly Vokhall, and the soothsayer, Krystal Ball. These selves exist both in IRL as well as URL. We/they perform and are also performative and through these personae I seek the meaning of the word identity, and use them to begin to experience the fluidity of subjectivity and the notion of a constructed "self".

This presentation will consist of an artist's talk to accompany a visual installation - presentation of my work concentrating on why and how I have "split" myself.

Di Ball is a hybrid artist undertaking postgraduate research at Griffith University Queensland College of Art. She has been an architect, a singer in a rock and roll band, and a human statue. Di's life has been described as a continual search for her own MEDIUM of expression, of creativity, and she has pursued the disciplined (architecture and the grid), the performative (actor, singer and percussionist) and the absurd (a Cuntry & Western comedienne). Di's artistic practice is multidisciplinary and self reflexive and she records and documents her journeys, her personal and personae.

Session Three - 3:30pm - 4:30pm

Michael FitzGerald

Truth and Character: Comedy and the Possibility of 'Plain-Dealing'

This paper explores the transformation of the concept 'character' during the seventeenth century, apprehended through the touchstone of the 'Theophrastan' character sketch; this prose genre makes an obsession of the ethics of self-representation, which the comedy of manners in turn takes as its pervasive theme (for instance, the playwrights of the English Restoration restrict the comic phenomenon to affectation rather than defect). It will be argued that a logic of 'character' comes to suggest a condition in which the individual is recast as an actor playing himself. Inevitably such a condition opens up the problematic of simulation and dissimulation - from Bossuet's retrieval of the Platonic anxiety over the ungrounded and unlimited imitative faculty (now importing a 'Levity, unsuitable to the Dignity of a Man,' and thus evoking the abyssal ramifications of Pico's vision of the creature free to create itself), to Diderot's restatement of the problem in the *Paradoxe sur le Comedien*. Devoid of a universal essence, the individual's simulation of itself cannot but be a dissimulation: this irony insinuates itself into seventeenth century thought with increasing bluntness. If 'truth' and especially 'self-truth' achieve, in the seventeenth century, a certain generality as axes of ethical problematisation, these concerns do not effect a straightforward ethical programme, but rather produce a loyalty to certain negative insights: that there is no truth of the self; and that 'character' is not endogenous to the individual but takes on meaning only in a social setting."

Michael FitzGerald is a Ph.D. candidate in the Centre for Comparative Literature and Cultural Studies, Monash University; He has Honours degrees in Arts and Law from the University of Melbourne (2002) and is a member of the Publications Committee, *Colloquy* journal.

Catherine Padmore

Debating Demidenko - ten years on

This presentation will be revisiting some of the main points of the Darville/Demidenko incident, viewed from today's perspective. The audience will be invited to participate in what promises to be a lively debate.

Dr Catherine Padmore lectures in the English program at La Trobe University. *Sibyl's Cave*, the novel written as part of her creative writing PhD, was published by Allen and Unwin in 2004 and was short-listed for both *The Australian/Vogel* Award and in the first book category of the Commonwealth Writers' Prize (South East Asia and South Pacific region).
