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Anxieties of influence: recursion and occlusion in Noel Pearson's 'Eulogy' for Gough Whitlam

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[abstract]

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> If to imagine is to misinterpret, which makes all poems antithetical to their precursors, then to imagine after a poet is to learn his [sic] own metaphors for his acts of reading. Criticism then necessarily becomes antithetical also, a series of swerves after unique acts of creative misunderstanding.[1]

Introduction

This article remembers a eulogy. Noel Pearson, a famous Aboriginal lawyer-turned-political-advocate, delivered that eulogy[2] at the funeral for Australia's sometime prime minister Gough Whitlam, himself one of the most widely recognised figures in Australian political history. It was a speech conspicuously informed by motives of emulation and of competitive distancing. Those twin motives make Pearson's 'Eulogy' a particularly revealing example of rhetorical composition and performance as moments in a life-cycle of rhetoric that entails the reception of discourse as well as its production. It also offers, not coincidentally, a revealing case for testing the application of Harold Bloom's poetics in the political sphere.

Bloom's *The Anxiety of Influence* imagines a quasi-pantheon of great poets, who commune with (and fear) one another across the ages, as though above the heads of ordinary mortals. It is mostly a boys' club. In these respects, Bloom's poetics offer an account of much political discourse that is strikingly sympathetic to the politicians. That is in part because, for all the elitism, Bloom offers an account of the relationship between composition and reception that is highly integrated. One way to characterise the account might be as a grammar of the claim to *greatness*, or to its equally numinous synonym *leadership*.

To conduct this argument, it will be useful to distil the poetic ratios of recursion and occlusion that lie at the heart of Bloom's readings, as of his analytic and argumentative methods, as of his own subjective position. In so doing, we approach a system of interrelations between protagonists that has much in common with Voloshinov's *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*:[3] a focus on how prototypes are reused and refused in the business of published discourse. As a matter of this article's own business, we can derive clear insights by following Voloshinov's method, to trace lines of relationship between Pearson's 'Eulogy' and various prototypes that it responds to. In doing so, we chart something profoundly resonant with Bloom's *great poets* category, and with its own anxieties of influence.

Greatness is a claim that moves many to skepticism, in a way that boys' clubs also do. Scholars of literary studies have systematically dismantled many of its guiding precepts over the last half-century or so, including the so called *canon* of texts that command all serious readers, around which many of our educations and most of Bloom's published works revolve (see especially Bloom, *Western Canon*).[4] One of the main lines of criticism against this line of scholarship has been the feminist tradition,[5] whose caveats on this article I would essentially endorse—even if they are

meagerly cited in the following discussion. Others have long demonstrated how possible it is to draw a feminist reading of Gough Whitlam's life and work, particularly since Eisenstein.[6] Cate Blanchett's eulogy at his funeral showed this need not be confined to a scholarly voice, too:

> I was but three when he passed by but I shall be grateful 'til the day I die.[7]

This article rehearses some theoretical prolegomena for such a reading, before expressly turning to focus on the 'Eulogy'. Here I explore four specific lines of influence that feature among Pearson's anxieties: (i) Pearson's earlier speech at the University of Western Sydney;[8] (ii) the 'old man' at the center of this speech, and an anxiety about old men; (iii) other readings and misreadings of Whitlam's life and work; and (iv) the particular specter of Martin Luther King.

Rhetorical redoubling: the valour of Voloshinov

The work behind this article belongs to a broader program of research into political rhetoric. That research itself revolves around two fairly simple manoeuvres: first, an insistence that the production and reception of rhetoric are essentially poetic experiences, hence subject to versions of all the norms we might associate with poetry;[9] and secondly, a holistic view of rhetoric that mandates a focus on reception as much as on production, being both of them critical moments in a cyclical, situationally responsive rhetoric that is characterised by dynamic exchange in all its aspects.

It is legitimate, therefore, to talk about rhetorical reception on equal terms with rhetorical production, much as a strong vein of scholarship[10] has sought to achieve with literary reception. It is also possible to talk about rhetorical reception in terms that marginalise rhetorical production, in that a reception may itself be the reception

of another reception. A coming paper will explore in closer detail this potential to efface rhetorical production; meanwhile it is important to note the inherently recursive model of political discourse this constructs, echoing the position of Michael Crozier.[11] Crozier's distinctive contribution here has been to show how political action *engenders* a profoundly recursive public discourse, as well as being profoundly *constituted by* it.

Recursive models of poetics readily arise from models of communication that we may essentially align with the 'redundancy and entropy' framework, which Shannon and Weaver popularised in their 1949 study *The Mathematical Theory of Communication* (Shannon and Weaver).[12] For this framework, meaning is as much invested in repetition as it is in innovation, and so the reception of meaning is profoundly invested in appraising, exploring, and playing with repetition too.

My fascination with *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* over twenty years and more has been for Voloshinov's determination to make repetition and its absence the methodological keys to his theory of language as ideology. Voloshinov explored how indirect speech reveals a speaker's ideology about language by tracing what reference and texture a quote or report retains from its prototype and what it discards. When I reuse your information in my own remarks, I valorise your contribution according to the 'reference analysing mode' of indirect speech. When I reuse your style, I valorise it according to the 'texture analysing mode.'

There are some gaps in this account, especially if we apply it to rhetoric.[13] One obvious oversight is the level of meaning that we can ascribe to neither the reference nor the texture of remarks, but which is integral to the purposes of rhetoric – namely, strategy. Much of the political motivation that gives rhetoric its currency is in such a category: we need some more specific method to deduce strategic affinities between

prototype remarks and their indirect re-uses than Voloshinov has proposed.

Nevertheless, the account has a great deal to commend it. Neither Voloshinov nor

Bakhtin lived to see the vindication when, 50 years later, another study of *Language*

as Ideology arrived at a comparable point, showing for example the use value of

Chomskyan transformations in an ideological analysis of news reportage.[14]

Turning from Voloshinov to Bloom

As suggested above, the essential manoeuvres of Bloom's *Anxiety of Influence* are

recursion and occlusion, a poetics of valorising and disavowing. Bloom posits a post-

Shakespeare literary world in which poets use each other's work as much as they

efface it, in hindsight as much as in foresight as much as in their subjective presents.

This offers a ready segue from Voloshinov, in that we may trace both affective and

informative lines of affiliation between precursor poets or poems and their successors,

analysing the connections in textural and referential terms accordingly. At the same

time, we may augment these methods with a strategy analysing mode, which traces

lines of affiliation between the motives of poets and poems.

In this vein, it is striking how Bloom's speculation about anxiety betrays his

own deep anxiety: his elaborated grammars of influence between poets chart his own

manifest desire to wield influence; his focus on greatness is his life project of

achieving greatness. 'Influence is Influenza—an astral disease,' he claims (*Anxiety*

95). It seems a deeply Emersonian proposition:

> In every work of genius we recognise our own rejected thoughts; they come back
> to us with a certain alienated majesty.[15]

Bloom is especially animated in exploring the tension between addressing a prototype and *misprising* it. For him, this is a necessity of the relationship of influence, hence a necessity of poetic expression:

> Poets, by the time they have grown strong, do not read the poetry of X, for really strong poets can read only themselves. For them, to be judicious is to be weak, and to compare, exactly and fairly, is to be not elect.[16]

At first blush, this doctrine of misprising – the dialectic of recursion and occlusion that governs relations between prototypes and protégés – eloquently captures the simultaneous receptiveness and blindness of political actors: the willingness to take on the discourses of others and the unwillingness to acknowledge prior authorship; the policy ideas that think tanks circulate through international networks before they find a hospitable champion, who then claims to have authored them; the gotcha claims of plagiarism when a politician copies another's phrases, often made by people reading from a sheet of talking points as they accuse. It readily lends itself to the 'leadership' norms of bourgeois politics, as idealistic as their presenting forms may seem: making the hard decisions; standing against popular opinion to do what is right; without fear or favour; incorruptible; a visionary; taking us out of our comfort zones; ringing the changes; *et cetera*. Bloom turns out to be more whiggish, less phenomenological, when we read his 'poetic history' into the analogue of political history:

> Poetic history, in this book's argument, is held to be indistinguishable from poetic influence, since strong poets make that history by misreading one another, so as to clear imaginative space for themselves.[17]

On the same page, he takes this line to its melodramatic extreme:

My concern is only with strong poets, major figures with the persistence to wrestle with their strong precursors, even to the death.

As a final point here, it is worth noting the ostensively taxonomic values Bloom endorses. Bloom offers six types of poetic influence, glossed in very particular ways — but allows there could be more than that (11). The following list is from his Table of Contents:

(1) *Clinamen* or Poetic Misprision.

(2) *Tessera* or Completion and Antithesis.

(3) *Kenosis* or Repetition and Discontinuity.

(4) *Daemonization* or The Counter-Sublime.

(5) *Askesis* or Purgation and Solipsism.

(6) *Apophrades* or The Return of the Dead.

'Ostensively' was my weasel word, of course. It is to put a question mark over the structural purports of Bloom's argument. He has not really presented a system of influences, for all his fascination with their grammar. Rather, he has identified some suitably mysterious criteria, by which the league tables of greatness – not least his own – may be measured and debated among garrulous Literary Studies scholars in their impassioned seminars and rowdy bars for generations to come. Bloom sees himself a Prospero and *The Anxiety of Influence* is his *Tempest*.

The Whitlam funeral oration

In Australian political history, the iconic prime ministers come in two flavours: those whose time in office was long, and those whose removal from office was dramatic. Gough Whitlam (dismissed by a conspiracy involving the governor-general) and Harold Holt (lost at sea while taking a recreational swim) are clear leaders of the latter

group. Holt is otherwise chiefly remembered as the prime minister who sent Australian combat troops into the Vietnam War – 'All the way with LBJ' – but the memory of his drowning overshadows that much greater disaster. Whitlam was the prime minister who pulled the troops out of Vietnam and ended military conscription in Australia, and he is certainly remembered for that. Further, Whitlam is remembered for a broader range of policy reforms than any other prime minister in Australia's history, even though he spent less than 3 years in that office — and yet he is still remembered chiefly for his removal from office. Such characters do cast deep shadows.

Whitlam died the 21st of October 2014, aged 98, almost 39 years after 'The Dismissal.' He was remembered at a state funeral at the Sydney Town Hall 15 days later, where a crowd of some thousands gathered outside as a visible corollary and envoy of the packed hall. Inside, approximately 2,000 people sat and listened to the ceremony. These were mostly named guests, in contrast to the *ad hoc* throng outside; the huge room, filled with celebrities and the powerful, hosted a conspicuously powerful moment of public celebration.

Also conspicuous during the service was its use of celebrities to lead the celebration of Whitlam's life and legacy. The leading musicians were Kev Carmody and Paul Kelly, singing 'From little things, big things grow,' their anthem to Whitlam and to Vincent Lingiari;[18] the leading speakers were Cate Blanchett and Noel Pearson. These are figures from outside the political parties, voices of a civil society in Australia that has leaned to the left of centre overwhelmingly since the 1960s. But as Pearson reminded the audience, there is still a hard partition between the in-tribe and any friends or sympathisers outside, between the partisans and the civil society:

Raised next to the wood heap of the nation's democracy, bequeathed no allegiance to any political party, I speak to this old man's legacy with no partisan brief.

Rather, my signal honour today on behalf of more people than I could ever know, is to express our immense gratitude for the public service of this old man.[19]

The Whitlam family had asked that Noel Pearson deliver his 'Eulogy' at Gough's 5 November funeral, based largely on a speech he had given a year earlier at the University of Western Sydney (discussed in detail below). Pearson's delivery was arresting. Wearing a charcoal suit, white shirt, and violet silk tie, he spoke for 18 minutes—note that is quite similar to the durations of several other speeches for transforming race relations that Australian publics have taken to heart: Paul Keating's 'Redfern Park Speech'[20] and Barack Obama's 'Yes we can' victory speech[21] were both 18 minutes long; King's 'I have a Dream'[22] lasted 17 minutes. Pearson read from his script in a slow voice, frequently halting, with a dynamic flare of volume in each phrase to underscore its passion. Meanwhile the setting, his wardrobe, his bare and almost bald head, and the black metal lectern with its twinned black microphones tacitly constrained his range of gesture and body language.

The words and their delivery carried many hearts that day. In the news media, on social media, and apparently in many thousands of conversations around the country, there was an outpouring of reverence for the 'Eulogy'. Much of this was a sense of public moment: critics and observers judged it a fitting tribute for a towering figure of Australian political history. Contemporary news photographs show those crowds outside the Sydney Town Hall, apparently listening to Pearson via the public address system while he spoke inside. There was also a judgment about the eulogy's quality as public rhetoric. Pearson summoned a certain greatness of style to pay

tribute to what Whitlam's most famous speechwriter (Freudenberg) called *A Certain Grandeur*.[23]

This article explores these aspects of the speech at length over the following four sections. At the same time, it pays close attention to the ghosts that haunt this speech and its speaker. Pearson, troubling public figure that he represents for some, made clear his command and gravitas in the field of Australian oratory through this speech. He also made clear his ambition to occupy such a role. Like all with an eye on greatness, he revealed how loudly he hears the footsteps of other players in that field. They haunt this speech even now, several years after its delivery.

Ghosts I: the 'Whitlam Oration'

As mentioned above, Pearson used an invitation to deliver the 2013 'Whitlam Oration' (to the Whitlam Institute at UWS, 13 November 2013) as a prior occasion to set out a 'non-partisan' encomium for the Whitlam government's achievement. He was invited to give his funeral oration on the basis of that earlier speech, and it shows. Both speeches single out the 1975 Racial Discrimination Act as Whitlam's greatest governmental legacy — largely for the opportunities it held open to litigation for Aboriginal interests. They share two rhetorical tropes, the Roman and the Old Man, with which the 'Eulogy' hooked public attention. The next section discusses these tropes in details.

The 'Whitlam Oration' was bound to influence the 'Eulogy', in part because it was the basis of the Whitlam family's invitation of Pearson. Another reason is the relative length of the two speeches: the earlier one treats the same historical material, but in far greater detail – 56 minutes at UWS compared with the 18 minutes of the 'Eulogy'. A third reason is speculative. Pearson has not reflected publicly on the

relationship between these two speeches, but it is hard to avoid the inference that the 2014 'Eulogy' was drafted and choreographed largely by a process of distilling and updating the 2013 'Whitlam Oration.'

Comparing the two, both transcripts and recordings, we get several glimpses of Pearson's anxiety that the later and shorter version not be overshadowed by its longer prototype. That danger seems to have been well allayed in its reception, since the public attention to the 'Eulogy' was much more immediate, broad, and enthusiastic than had been the case for the 'Whitlam Oration', as even a cursory web search makes clear. What is more, few commentators who responded to the 'Eulogy' set it in a context of its prototype, although the journalist Kerry O'Brien did so in his introduction to the ABC's official broadcast of the funeral.[24] Others who took O'Brien's hint to compare and contrast the speeches were typically responding after the week of the funeral.[25]

One signal that Pearson's 'Eulogy' arises from an anxiety about his 'Whitlam Oration' is the assertiveness of the outsider-made-great tropes with which the 'Eulogy' opens. At the funeral, Pearson was on the front foot in making claims for his standing to give the speech. Here are the first two paragraphs of the published transcript:

> Paul Keating said the reward for public life is public progress.
>   For one born estranged from the nation's citizenship, into a humble family of a marginal people striving in the teeth of poverty and discrimination, today it is assuredly no longer the case.[26]

At UWS, by comparison, Pearson's opening gambit used similar themes, but showed a much greater sense of duty to suppress his own personal claims. It also set his

outsider trope into a clearer historical perspective. Here again are the first two paragraphs:

In his 97th year, in this third oration in honour of Australia's 21st prime minister, I use the appellation 'old man' with all the reverence and love of its meaning in the ancient culture of my people. An acute consciousness of the honour bestowed by the governors of the Whitlam Institute to one so richly undeserving, is leavened by unalloyed gratitude for the chance to salute this old man in the twilight of his extraordinary life. The alacrity with which this invitation is seized, belies somewhat the humility which an outsider should properly feel when afforded such a rare and august privilege.

I say 'outsider' in the sense of the Australian Labor Party, but if I was born estranged from the nation's citizenship, into a humble family of a marginal people striving in the teeth of poverty and discrimination – it is assuredly no longer the case. This because of the equalities of opportunities afforded by the Whitlam program which successive governments built upon, and even where predilections were otherwise, their institutionalisation made their reversal difficult. The truth is, I, and numbers of my generation are today, bourgeois, albeit with varying propensities to decadence.[27]

Another indicator of unease about the comparisons between these speeches is the way they handle the one main joke they share. In this extended episode, the two speeches are identically phrased:

Thirty-eight years later we are like John Cleese, Eric Idle and Michael Palin's Jewish insurgents ranting against the despotic rule of Rome, defiantly demanding 'and what did the Romans ever do for us anyway?'
    'Apart from Medibank?'
    'and the Trade Practices Act 1974?'
    'cutting tariff protections?'
    'and no-fault divorce and the Family Law Act 1975?'
    'the Australia Council?'
    'the Federal Court?'
    'the Order of Australia?'
    'federal legal aid?'

'the Racial Discrimination Act 1975?'

'needs-based schools funding?'

'the recognition of China?'

'the Law Reform Commission?'

'the abolition of conscription?'

'student financial assistance?'

'FM radio and the Heritage Commission?'

'non-discriminatory immigration rules?'

'community health clinics?'

'Aboriginal land rights?'

'paid maternity leave for public servants?'

'lowering the minimum voting age to 18 years?'

'fair electoral boundaries and Senate representation for the Territories?'

'Apart from all of this, what did this Roman ever do for us?'

And the prime minister with that classical Roman mien, one who would have been as naturally garbed in a toga as a safari suit, stands imperiously with twinkling eyes and that slight self-mocking smile playing around his mouth – in turn infuriating his enemies and delighting his followers.[28]

I call it an episode, partly because of its recurrence – in addition to these words running through both speeches, news media selected them as one of the leading grabs for coverage of the funeral that evening and in the following days – but also partly for the sense of *a strange episode*. Pearson is typically a heavy speaker, not light. His stock in trade is a vehemence that speaks of hardships encountered directly. Paying attention to his public contributions, it is easy to lose awareness of the irony he often wields. In response to the Mabo and Wik judgements, he repeatedly proposed that England's great cultural contributions to Australia have been cricket, Earl Grey tea, and the common law. Here, reprising *Monty Python's Life of Brian*, he reprises another: deadpan farce by way of historical commentary.

Ghosts II: The old man, and old men

Nothing influences so uncannily as the voice of a mentor past. That can only be truer for a mentor with an uncanny voice. In a vaguely quantitative effort to analyse the 'Eulogy', I have noted that it calls Whitlam a 'Roman' three times. The 'Whitlam Oration' spoke that phrase three times also, not counting an unspoken subheading in the published transcript. But the epithet 'old man' was more prolific. His 'Whitlam Oration' uses it 11 times to reference Whitlam, as well as once to reference John Koowarta of the Wik people. In the 'Eulogy' he calls Whitlam 'old man' 10 times, as well as the John Koowarta mention. Elsewhere it is an epithet that Pearson has used to reference Eddie Mabo, Vincent Lingiari, and a small number of others in whose shadows he declares to tread. If Pearson uses a comparable phrase to denote the leadership contributions of women, I have not yet located it.

A connotation of anciency and more specifically of elderhood is hardly incompatible with the label *Roman*, whether used ironically or otherwise, but recall that the 'Whitlam Oration' spells out Pearson's more specific rationale for calling a white Australian politician an *old man* in its opening sentence:

> In his 97th year, in this third oration in honour of Australia's 21st prime minister, I use the appellation 'old man' with all the reverence and love of its meaning in the ancient culture of my people.

Bestowing this *formula*[29] on Whitlam thus anoints him an Aboriginal elder – an elder *honoris causa*. At UWS it was done in a speech to Whitlam family and friends while Gough, not present in the room, was in 'the twilight of his life' (another formula). A year later, it was done before a larger public and in the presence of his afterlife, and it offered a more pithy version of the rationale. This is the Eulogy's final sentence:

> When he breathed he truly was Australia's greatest white elder and friend
> without peer of the original Australians.

Here, with the script's prose at its sharpest, we can also hear the misprision at its loudest. A white man, scion of the family of the White Lamb, is rendered a leader among black leaders. He is a national figure, a champion since 1967 of the need to grapple with Australia's deepest challenge to its political self-conception. This program-to-grapple – variously described as equal rights, as land rights, as treaty, as reconciliation, as closing the gap, as recognition, *et cetera* – is also the leading motive of Pearson's public life. It is his most constant claim on public attention, as well as the main reason why partisan forces of both the institutional left (such as the UWS Whitlam Institute) and the institutional right (such as News Corporation) cry out for his involvement. In sum, Gough Whitlam was a Pearson-kind-of-man before the Pearson-man-proper was made. Whitlam is a prototype for much that Pearson wishes to be, or hopes he has become—and the tension between those two is never clearer than when Noel Pearson speaks in Gough Whitlam's memory, under a huge photograph of Whitlam pouring the Wave Hill Station's earth into Vincent Lingiari's hands in 1975:

> Vincent Lingiari, I solemnly hand to you these deeds as proof, in Australian law,
> that these lands belong to the Gurindji people and I put into your hands part of
> the earth itself as a sign that this land will be the possession of you and your
> children forever. [30]

As with most published accounts of that moment, Pearson quoted Whitlam's ceremonial words, but not Lingiari's eye-to-the-future reply:

> Let us live happily together as mates; let us not make it hard for each other.[31]

Had he included just this one extra sentence, or the passage of speech it introduces, Pearson might have heard the Gurindji old man's imprecations against anxiety, against haunting. They underscore the Carmody and Kelly song also played that day, which Carmody prefaced with a few spoken words:

> It's a great privilege and an honour to be here to celebrate the legacy of this old man. We always felt he was a comrade in our camp.[32]

Ghosts III: Other condolences for Whitlam

In the days between 21 October and 4 November 2014, many others spoke their minds about Whitlam. This stream of discourse began with a rapid onset. On the 21st, starting business at midday rather than the usual 9.00 am, members of the House of Representatives then sitting in Canberra addressed a motion of condolence.[33] In this expressly partisan forum, there were several readings of the late prime minister's life on offer (Commonwealth of Australia). To the extent that they differed, we may regard them each as competing to offer the distillation of Whitlam's life and work most noticed in public memories of him.

One fairly common line was to attempt to characterise Whitlam by a single leading policy achievement. This was the approach of Adam Bandt from the Australian Greens, who was granted a short moment to speak at the close of the debate:

> My dad earlier today, as someone who was the son of a post office worker, told me that he had never dreamed that he would complete a university degree and go on to complete more than one and that the only reason he could do it was because of Gough.[34]

We may find some common motive here with those who used the moment to assert their 'inheritance from Gough,' almost entirely in the terms of his policy program.

This was an especially common response from politicians of the Labor Party. This reading entails a formulaic debt to his 'legacy of reform'—note this is a claim that Pearson's 'Eulogy' rebuked directly, decrying a lack of policy courage in the federal parliament of 2014. A leading example was the Labor deputy leader, Anthony Albanese:

> I think the legacy of our political contribution can be judged by the permanency of it. If you look at Gough Whitlam's great reforms—access to education being opened up, recognition of China, engagement of our lives in the full cultural activities, and removal of discrimination against women and on the basis of race through the Racial Discrimination Act—all of these measures have stood the test of time. All of them were very controversial at that time. Gough Whitlam leaves a great legacy to the nation. He taught us to be brave—brave about our reform ambitions, brave in the face of our critics and unstintingly brave in the pursuit of the greatest ambition any of us could ever pursue: justice and opportunity for all.[35]

On the conservative side, many speakers took 'legacy' to mean something different, a more generic accumulation of public services that have not been forgotten by their beneficiaries after a testing span of years—especially not by his adversaries. Leading this tendency was the prime minister Tony Abbott, who spoke first in the condolence debate:

> After 23 years of coalition government, Australians wanted change. It was time, as the famous campaign song proclaimed—probably the only campaign song that anyone can now remember. Whitlam represented more than a new politics; he represented a new way of thinking about government, about our region, about our place in the world and about change itself. Nineteen seventy two was his time, and all subsequent times have been shaped by his time. His government ended conscription, recognised China, introduced Medibank, abolished university fees, decolonised Papua New Guinea, transformed our approach to Indigenous policy and expanded the role of the Commonwealth, particularly in the field of social services. These were highly contentious at the time; some of

these measures are still contentious; but, one way or another, our country has never been quite the same. Members of his government displayed the usual human foibles, but, support it or oppose it, there was a largeness of purpose to all his government attempted—even if its reach far exceeded its grasp, as the 1975 election result showed. He may not have been our greatest Prime Minister, but he was certainly one of the greatest personalities that our country has ever produced. And no Prime Minister has been more mythologised.[36]

Preemptively crowding some of the rhetorical domain that Pearson's 'Eulogy' would occupy, numerous speakers recalled Gough as an epitome of classical values. Christopher Pyne as leader of the house was one of many:

> In thinking of Whitlam, I am reminded of the writings of Plutarch in writing about the life of Pericles in his book about the lives of the Athenians. He wrote: 'Virtue in action immediately takes such hold of a man that he no sooner admires a deed than he sets out to follow in the steps of the doer.'
>
> You always got the impression with Gough Whitlam that he was a follower of heroes, but also wanted to be a hero himself. In fact, to many in the non-Labor side of politics, as is clear by this debate so far and from what I am sure is to come, he is a hero to many in the non-Labor side of politics. To me, Gough Whitlam conjures up images of a great ancient Greek or Roman statesman: a person of great wit, sophistication, eloquence and privilege but giving his life over to public service—seeing public service as the most important thing that he could do to make his society and his country a greater place.[37]

Taking a conceit of Greek leadership higher up the chain, Malcolm Turnbull offered a gorgeous example of Whitlam's self-mythologising:

> There has been a lot of discussion about Gough's regard for the great beyond. Gough is resolving his relationship with God as we speak, no doubt, but he was always very entertaining about those issues of the divine. I remember 25 years ago ... Nicholas and Judy brought Gough and Margaret up to visit us at the farm in the Hunter Valley that I had inherited from my father some years before. Unfortunately, a fog had descended on this particular part of the country and you could not see anything. It was just white everywhere you looked; it was like

being in a white cloud. I said to Gough, 'I'm really sorry. It's a nice view here but you can't see any of it.' He said, 'Oh, don't be concerned. I'm completely at home. It's just like Olympus.'[38]

We should note that a care for style and grandeur was not exclusive to the right. Perhaps mindful of Freudenberg's book, the Labor frontbencher Tanya Plibersek spoke of a consummate ease that put others at ease:

> On hearing of Gough's passing today, many people have described Gough as a giant of our nation—and he was. He was, as the Deputy Prime Minister said, a towering figure physically. He also had the ability to deliver soaring rhetoric. But his actions were also very down to earth. He was a very warm person on a one-to-one basis. I remember when my parents first met him. They were almost embarrassed to talk to him, because they admired him so much. He was so incredibly warm and welcoming to them, particularly to my mother. His ability to talk at an international level about issues of enormous complexity and convince an audience on the one hand and speak person to person to any Australian and make them feel respected and included was phenomenal. It was a phenomenal ability.[39]
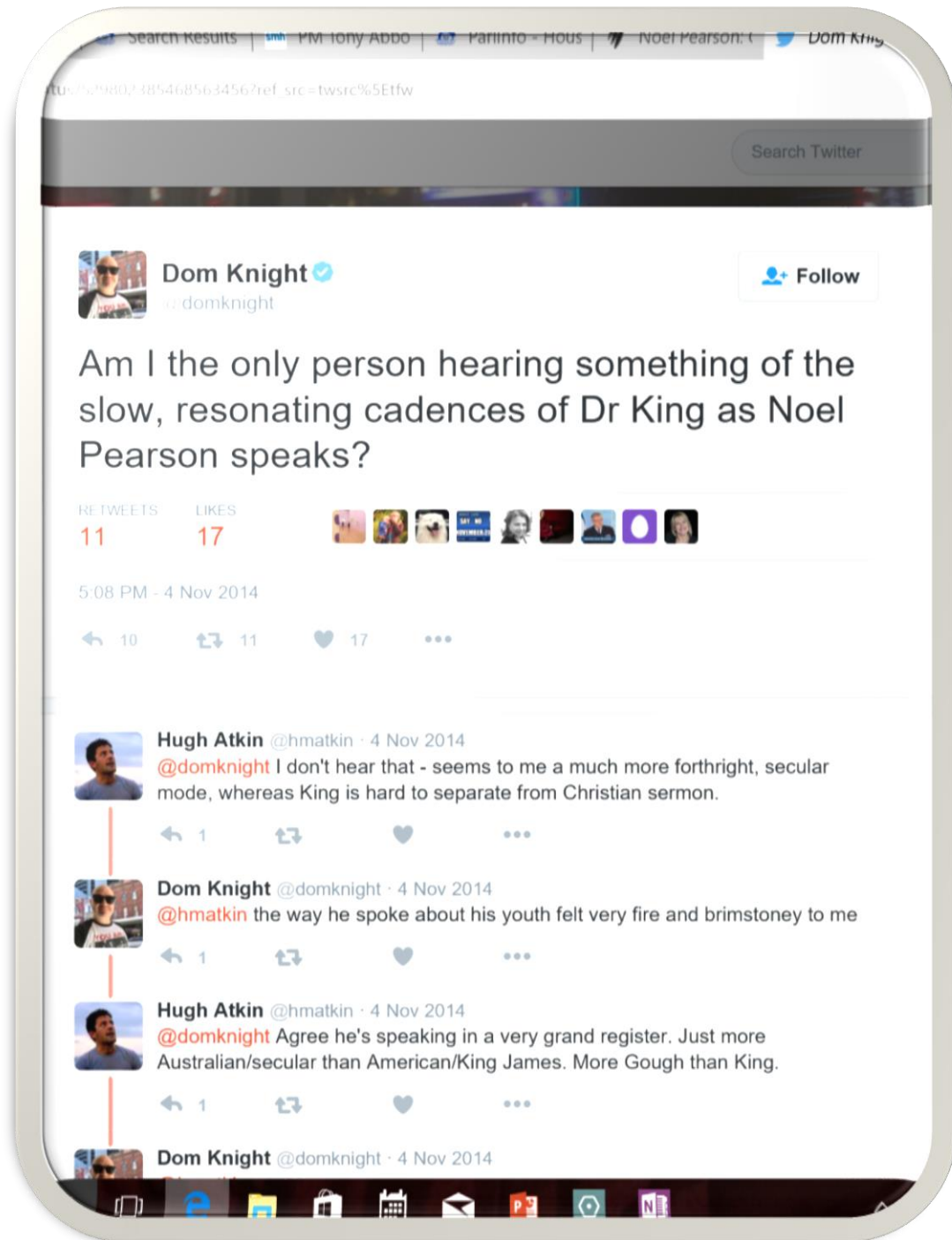
As Bloom contends, any strong reading is necessarily a misreading. It is always disproportionate to the fullness of its text or exponent. Pearson, in occupying this crowded rhetorical domain, could only assert a claim to greatness by eclipsing what is already on offer, just as he had to eclipse his own earlier speech, and just as he had to eclipse our memories of Whitlam himself.

Ghosts IV: Martin Luther King

There was something inevitable about Pearson getting compared to Martin Luther King if ever he made a famously impressive speech. From time to time, the racialised Other produces leadership figures that can be acceptable to a conservative hegemony without disavowing their otherness; the Right's treatment of Pearson – in the news

media as in institutional politics – repeatedly indicates he is one such. What is more, Whitlam-as-antiracist is a topic that draws attention to antiracism-in-general. Cate Blanchett's vignette about Cabramatta during her eulogy also underscores this point. For a polity like Australia's, the age-of-Aquarius decision to reject racial discrimination as any reasonable basis for public policy was such a change of outlook, such a huge leap of faith for the white hegemonic majority, that its champions in public office (Whitlam and Malcolm Fraser in particular) are profoundly associated with that cause. The grammar of public memory essentially requires their collocation.

When people align Pearson's speech with antiracism in general, or with Martin Luther King in particular, they make a collocation that is thematically required, yet they typically draw it out in stylistic or affective terms. See, for example, this tweet that satirist Dom Knight circulated on the day of the funeral:[40]

'Slow resonating cadences' underscores the way this comparison is intended as praise, especially coming from an artist employed by the ABC. Participants in an ABC Radio National online survey in 2011 rated King's 'I Have a Dream' speech the most memorable speech ever (that is, the most memorable in all human history)—pushing

Christ's 'Sermon on the Mount' into second place, and all Australian contributions even lower down the scale. These readings are contestable, of course, as the responses to Knight's tweet make plain.

It makes intuitively obvious sense to focus on 'slow, resonating cadences,' then. One way Pearson's 'Eulogy' stands out from the 'Whitlam Oration' is its more dramatic articulation. As Knight went on to clarify, 'the way he spoke about his youth felt very fire and brimstoney to me.' Perhaps it was the quasi-religious ritual of a public (albeit secular) funeral, housed within the muted gothic architecture of the Sydney Town Hall, that prompted people to hear a gospel preaching tradition that has characterised so much of public life on the Aboriginal missions, including especially in far north Queensland—whereas no commentary that I have sourced so far picked up on any similar quality when commenting on the 'Whitlam Oration.' It is a revealing comparison, given that Pearson's 'Whitlam Oration' included almost all the phrases used in his 'Eulogy,' and used some of its extra time to tell us greater detail about the intersection of church and community life on the Lutheran mission at Hope Vale, north of Cooktown, where Pearson was brought up.

In the 'Eulogy', then, people actively *wanted* to hear echoes of 'I Have a Dream,' but Bloom's theory has the great protégé uneasy about her or his affiliation to the great prototype. Publics do not recall Pearson's 'Eulogy' for a phrase or refrain, the way they recall the refrain of King's speech—or Obama's 'Yes we can,' for that matter, or Keating's 'We committed the murders.' Pearson's 'Eulogy' did not wander off-script in its most impressive section, the way King's speech did for its final 6 minutes—searching for its own echoes of previous King speeches, among other motives.[41] It did not enter call-and-response with the crowd, the way powerful gospel oratory often does. It will be remembered for an argumentative proposition, and for

the mood of austere reverence in which Pearson cloaked that proposition. His 'Eulogy' begs comparison with speeches by famous black activists from the Anglosphere, within the history of sound and video recording, none more so than King's supremely most famous example—and yet it cannot tolerate such comparisons.

Some concluding thoughts

In the preceding sections, we see consistent evidence of symmetry between Bloom's greatness-fetishising theory of poetry and the greatness-fetishising praxis of oratory. Nothing stands out more clearly than the ease with which we may substitute 'rhetoric' or 'rhetorical' at Pearson's moment of political commemoration in 2014 for 'poetry' or 'poetic' as they stood in Bloom's 1973 understanding of Literary Studies. All production of rhetoric is in response to rhetoric. All rhetorical products or texts carry an assumption of response. It is not clear that a rhetorical response requires an original rhetorical product, but clearly some respondents are driven to function as producers.

Perhaps the most subtle question that matters here is one of methodology. Can we routinely read back from evidence of 'the anxiety of influence' to infer a version of Bloom's *great poets* fetish in the field of rhetoric? If so, the life-cycle of contemporary political discourse must be a very tight circle, very hard to break or replace. Given the integration of production and reception is a necessary condition for any given discourse – in order to find, create, and sustain its publics[42] – there must be a widely shared complicity in the fetishising of greatness—shared between producers (who are also receivers) and receivers (who are also producers). Leadership norms are integral to the ecosystem of this putative life-cycle for our rhetoric. They flourish in

the formulas that characterise its poetics, deeply confident about status and hierarchy and deeply pessimistic about any alternatives to them.

To the extent one may believe in a structural deficit or dysfunction within contemporary political discourse, it is crucial that we better understand this dynamic relationship between the production and reception of rhetoric. For the many who believe a rhetorical deficit or dysfunction now entails a crisis of democracy, better understanding the full life-cycle of rhetoric is an urgent gap in knowledge. No matter how privileged, any oration of recursion and occlusion has things to say about the broader polity, whether democratic or otherwise—since it is the citizens or subjects of that polity who must live out whatever philology their leadership appoints for them.

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[1] Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 93.

[2] Noel, Pearson, *In Full: Noel Pearson Remembers Gough Whitlam (Video)*, (Sydney: Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 2014).

[3] V.N. Voloshinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, trans. Ladislav Matejka and I. R. Titunik (London: Seminar Press, 1929). Note this is a strongly contested citation, with some scholars (e.g. Clark and Holquist) believing that Mikhail Bakhtin wrote the work and used his already-liquidated friend's name as a pseudonym to publish it without bringing jeopardy on himself.

[4] See especially Harold Bloom, *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2014).

[5] A much-cited leader of this critique has been Rita Felski, *Literature after Feminism*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

[6] Hester Eisenstein, 'Speaking for Women? Voices from the Australian Femocrat Experiment,' *Australian Feminist Studies* 6:14 (1991): 29-42.

7 Cate Blanchett, 'Cate Blanchett pays tribute to Gough Whitlam (full text and video),' 2014 (accessed 22/8/2017: <http://www.smh.com.au/comment/cate-blanchett-pays-tribute-to-gough-whitlam-full-text-20141105-11hdb1.html>).

8 Noel Pearson, '2013 Gough Whitlam Oration,' 2013 (accessed 15/6/2017: <https://www.whitlam.org/the_program/gough_whitlam_oration/2013_gough_whitlam_oration>). The University of Western Sydney (UWS) has since been renamed Western Sydney University (WSU). This article uses the 2013 name or acronym when referring to Pearson's 'Whitlam Oration.'

9 Tom Clark, *Stay on Message: Poetry and Truthfulness in Political Speech* (Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2012).

10 Much of it surveyed in Ika Willis, *Reception* (London: Routledge, 2017).

11 Michael Crozier, 'Recursive Governance: Contemporary Political Communication and Public Policy,' *Political Communication* 24:1 (2007): 1-18.

12 Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver, *The Mathematical Theory of Communication* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998).

13 Voloshinov explicitly makes this link (122).

14 Robert Hodge and Gunther R. Kress, *Language as Ideology*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979).

15 Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Essays: 1st & 2nd Series by Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Everyman ed. (London: J.M. Dent, 1906), 30.

16 *Anxiety*, 19.

17 *Anxiety*, 5.

18 Kev Carmody and Paul Kelly, 'From Little Things, Big Things Grow (video recording),' 2014 (accessed 22/8/2017: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dAONlfoNVuY>).

19 Pearson, *Remembers Gough Whitlam*.

20 Paul Keating, 'Redfern Park Speech,' 1992 (accessed 31/8/2017: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x1S4F1euzTw>).

21 Barack Obama, 'Barack Obama's Victory Speech,' 2008 (accessed 25/7/2017: <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=96624326>).

22 Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., 'I Have a Dream,' 1963 (accessed 31/8/2017: <http://americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlkihaveadream.htm>).

23 Graham Freudenberg, *A Certain Grandeur: Gough Whitlam's Life in Politics* (Melbourne: Viking, 2009).

24 Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), *Gough Whitlam State Memorial Service*, video recording, (Sydney: ABC, 2014).

25 Chris Graham, 'Noel Pearson: I have another Dream. Thankfully, it's an Hour Shorter' *New Matilda*, 2014 (accessed 25/7/2017: <https://newmatilda.com/2014/11/10/noel-pearson-i-have-another-dream-thankfully-its-hour-shorter/>).

26 Pearson, *Remembers Gough Whitlam*.

27 Pearson, 'Whitlam Oration.'

28 Pearson, *Remembers Gough Whitlam*; Pearson, 'Whitlam Oration.'

29 This term is expressly used after the fashion of Milman Parry, *The Making of Homeric Verse: The Collected Papers of Milman Parry*, ed. Adam Parry (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 272: 'A group of words which is regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea.'

30 Pearson, *Remebers Whitlam*.

31 Sally Warhaft, *Well May We Say: The Speeches That Made Australia* (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 2014), 361.

32 Carmody and Kelly.

33 Commonwealth of Australia. *House of Representatives Official Hansard: Tuesday, 21 October 2014* (Canberra: House of Representatives, 2014), 11517-50.

34 *Hansard*, 11549.

35 *Hansard*, 11536.

36 *Hansard*, 11517.

37 *Hansard*, 11533.

[38] *Hansard*, 11541.

[39] *Hansard*, 11523-4.

[40] Dom Knight, tweet, 12:08 pm 5 November 2014 (accessed 31/8/2018:

<https://twitter.com/domknight/status/529802385468563456?s=20>).

[41] Drew D Hansen, *The Dream: Martin Luther King Jr., and the Speech that Inspired a

Nation* (New York: Harpercollins Publishers Inc., 2003).

[42] C.f. Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2001).