

Chapter 6: The ideological bias in English text selection: from Left to far Left to extreme Left and everything in-between

The ideological domination of the education system and its curricula by the politically correct Left is one of this social movement's most advantageous political achievements since the 1960s. This domination, of course, includes the domination of the choice of English texts set for study in high school. When looking at the year 12 English text list for any year, it is evident that the texts chosen for study, with few exceptions, are overwhelmingly politically correct and left-wing or, if they are not overtly politically correct and left-wing, they are texts that could be interpreted or reinterpreted to be accommodated within the politically correct, left-wing world view. This has been the situation for decades and it is the situation as it currently stands.

And there is not the slightest inclination among those in the politically correct Left establishment who are in authority in the education system to give up this advantage or even compromise it slightly. They know its value and they protect it resolutely. It is an ideal position from which to influence the young and to thereby contribute to the further transformation of the nation according to their politically correct, left-wing values. This ideological capture of the education system and its curricula ranks with the ideological capture of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), which is the largest media and broadcasting network in the country that has an enormous influence on the generation of news and culture.

Denying the undeniable

Importantly, a dimension of maintaining this ideological domination is to publicly pretend that no such thing has occurred, just as they do with the ABC. They do not deny this ideological domination because it is untrue; they deny it because it is true and they want to keep the situation as it stands. It is a political game they play, and it is probably a necessary one. So, in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary they publicly maintain this denial. There is probably an understandable fear among them that if they publicly admit to an ideological bias in the curriculum there is a risk that their protective wall of deliberate silence and avoidance could be breached and they could be forced by a concerned government to compromise, at least a little.

Power is exercised not only by putting issues on the public agenda but also by keeping issues off the agenda. The ideological bias of the education system and its curricula is an issue that the politically correct Left establishment wants to keep off the agenda, along with the issue of the ideological bias of the ABC, and they want to maintain this situation indefinitely.

When a conservative or liberal commentator (or sometimes a politician) raises the issue of ideological bias in the education system, the politically correct Left education establishment denies that any bias exists and claims that the critic is wholly mistaken. That is how this political game is played, and it is how it has been played over and over and over again. It is a tactic that has worked and worked well. It is one of the oldest games in Australian politics.

Here is an example of the game being played. Speaking to a sympathetic audience at the Queensland Teachers Union Conference on 21 June 2005, the then federal president of the Australian Education Union (AEU) Pat Byrne declared: 'We have succeeded in influencing curriculum development in schools, education departments and

universities. The conservatives have a lot of work to do to undo the progressive curriculum'. However, on 6 October 2006, when making a public response to a question from the media regarding a minister in the Howard Coalition Government who criticised the ideological bias in the high school History curriculum, she declared: 'There is no evidence that in fact the curriculum has been hijacked by left-wing ideologues'.

Some other familiar tactics used to shut down debate in this area include *ad hominem* attacks, which involve attempting to discredit the author of the argument rather than substantially addressing the argument itself. For example, this can involve dismissing the critic as a 'middle-class white male' to undermine the value of his perspective on these issues. Or, there is the tactic of 'attacking a straw man', which involves deliberately exaggerating and misrepresenting the critic's argument to make it seem so ridiculous that it collapses under its own weight or is easily refuted and dismissed (an example of which you can see above in the use of hyperbolic language like 'hijacked by left-wing ideologues'). Or, by making a false accusation, accusing the critic of trying to 'politicise' the curriculum, which, of course, is based on the false assumption that a curriculum dominated by the politically correct Left constitutes what is normal so any attempt to modify this, even slightly, can be incorrectly labelled as 'politicisation'. And on the rare occasions when these tactics do not work and the politically correct, left-wing education establishment finds itself to still be under pressure from a concerned government, it resorts to having the issue examined by academic 'experts' (drawn from the milieu of the politically correct Left) who, predictably, reach conclusions in support of maintaining the politically correct, left-wing status quo. And that usually does the trick. The issue of left-wing bias again falls off the agenda.

At this point it is necessary to make some points of clarification. This curriculum bias is predominantly an ideological bias rather than

a political one. It is predominantly an ideological bias favouring the values and perspectives of the politically correct Left rather than a political bias favouring the Australian Labor Party, the Greens and the Socialist Alliance. Any bias that favours the Australian Labor Party, the Greens and the Socialist Alliance, usually does so indirectly. Furthermore, this critique of the curriculum that I am advancing here expresses no desire to politicise the English text list but rather a desire to depoliticise it by promoting the principle that the choice of texts be made according to educational decisions as to their cultural, aesthetic and historical significance. These choices should, over the course of six years of high school, attempt to cover major literary eras, trends and significant contributions to thereby collectively contribute to what constitutes a well-rounded education in English literature, which would include becoming familiar with major texts in the history of literature, such as Homer's *Iliad* or George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. If done sincerely and well, this process would automatically address what in postmodern jargon would be the 'silences' and 'omissions' in the English text list, the silence and omission of conservative, liberal and other non-Left voices of literary value. In addition, this critique, of course, includes the recognition that many left-wing texts rank among the most significant works of literature and are not only worthy of study but indispensable as part of a well-rounded education. Politically correct and postmodern texts should be categorised appropriately and studied proportionally as dimensions of contemporary trends in literature rather than being allowed to overwhelm almost the entire course. In this context, it is also important to point out, for example, that texts of literary value that promote either moderate or radical versions of multicultural ideology can contribute to achieving a well-rounded education. However, what is at issue here is not so much the views expressed in these texts, but rather the educational limitations resulting from an overwhelming politically correct, left-wing ideological bias that crowds out other

texts of literary value that express different opinions that can also contribute to achieving a well-rounded education.

It should also be pointed out that this ideological domination of the curriculum by political correctness did not involve a process as dramatic as being ‘hijacked by ideologues’. It is mostly a consequence of the day-to-day reality that virtually everyone involved in setting the curriculum shares the same politically correct, left-wing values and beliefs. It is mostly a consequence of the virtual absence in the education system of the ideological diversity evident in the Australian community.

It is also a consequence of the official selection criteria giving insufficient weight to choosing texts according to their cultural, aesthetic and historical significance and too much opportunity for making choices for the text list that promote politically correct, left-wing values at the expense of others.

The official criteria for English text selection and how they operate in practice

Let’s look at how the text selection process works in the selection of texts for year 12 English. At the year 12 level, the text list is approved by the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA), which has received advice from a text selection advisory panel that meets regularly and consists of about twelve members, mostly teachers but including one or two academics. Members of the advisory panel make suggestions, or present suggestions passed on to them by others, and discuss the options. A prospective list is produced regarding the texts to be rotated on or rotated off the official list. Texts stay on the list for about 2 to 4 years. About 25 per cent of the texts are changed each year.

Once approved, the official English text list is published on the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority website. High school English faculties choose four texts for their students to study from

the official list of thirty-six texts that currently includes eight pairs of texts that are meant for comparison. The four texts chosen must include one of these pairs. In addition, the texts that are not paired are grouped according to the following categories: novels, short story collections, plays, poetry or songs, multimodal texts such as films or graphic novels, and nonfiction texts.

The selection of the year 12 text list is supposed to follow official text-section criteria set by the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority that are articulated in a preamble to the published text list.

Let's examine these criteria and see how they operated regarding 'VCE English and English as an Additional Language (EAL) Text List 2018'. (You probably appreciate that I could have examined the English text list for any year. In regards to ideological bias, they all tell the same story.)

The official criteria for individual text selection are the following:

Each text selected for the VCE English and EAL text list will:

- have literary merit
- be an excellent example of form and genre
- sustain intensive study, raising interesting issues and providing challenging ideas
- reflect current community standards and expectations in the context of senior secondary study of texts.

These text selection criteria for individual texts are what most people would expect to see and they are not, in themselves, ideological. However, what the politically correct Left may regard as having 'literary merit' or as 'raising interesting issues' or as reflecting 'current community standards' may differ from the perceptions of many others in the community. This means that the ideological disposition and tastes of those who are on the text selection advisory panel and of those in the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority

who have the authority to approve the list, will matter. But there is more to text selection than these criteria for individual text selection. The selections made according to these criteria must be modified according to additional criteria that are intended to characterise the nature of the entire list.

These additional criteria are not just educational, they are also ideological, but the degree to which they are ideological in practice will depend on who is interpreting these criteria. If these persons are of the politically correct Left, as they invariably are, then the text list can become very ideologically biased indeed. Text selection is potentially controversial. Therefore, steps have been taken in the choice of selection criteria, and in their careful wording, so the education establishment can have its way ideologically while appearing to be reasonable and broad-minded. When you read these additional criteria, you will probably notice, as I did, that these additional criteria employ euphemistic or deliberately vague language in what seems like an attempt to stave off potential criticism from conservative or liberal commentators and the public in regards to what can be a hotly-debated dimension of the curriculum:

The text list as a whole will:

- be suitable for a diverse student cohort from a range of backgrounds and contexts, including students studying English as an additional language
- reflect the cultural diversity of the Victorian community
- include texts by Australians, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- include a balance of new and established works, including a Shakespearean text
- include texts that display affirming perspectives
- reflect engagement with global perspectives.

To many people the references to ‘diverse’ and ‘diversity’ in the first two criteria can seem merely descriptive when, in this context, these terms are profoundly ideological. The politically correct see ‘diversity’ in terms of race, ethnicity, class, gender and sexual preference rather than in terms of the diversity of ideas. For the politically correct, the term ‘diversity’ has largely superseded the word ‘multiculturalism’ as best encapsulating their world view, since it involves a genuflection towards the whole gamut of politically correct and postmodern beliefs. And to the politically correct, the only appropriate way to respond to this ‘diversity’ is with texts that reflect or promote political correctness since the politically correct regard their ideology and values as best suited to that task. In practice this means that, for example, the ethnicity of our Vietnamese citizens could potentially be respected in text choices rather than their opposition to Marxism.

The presence of racial and ethnic diversity in the community has for a long time been used as a rationalisation by the politically correct Left to justify the changes they have always advocated. In this case, it is used to justify their politically correct text choices for the English curriculum. Decades ago, when Australian society was less racially and ethnically diverse, the advocates of political correctness did not sing a different tune. They promoted political correctness just as vigorously then as they do now. And one could reasonably speculate that if demographic trends changed and the Australian population became less rather than more diverse, they would not find this to be a reason to change from singing from the same politically correct songbook from which they have always sung. And the fact that a great many migrant and refugee families do not share the politically correct beliefs of the education establishment has never in the past prompted them to reconsider their ideological interpretation of ‘diversity’.

Furthermore, the last two criteria that assert that the texts should ‘display affirming perspectives’ and ‘reflect engagement with global perspectives’ are also ideological, especially when interpreted by the

politically correct and they complement the criteria on reflecting ‘diversity’. To the politically correct, being ‘affirming’ means what they consider to be affirming for ideologically designated ‘victim groups’ (defined according to race, ethnicity, class, gender and sexual preference) since this is precisely what the politically correct see their ideology as being about. However, in practice what this often translates into is what is affirming for pacifists, Marxists/socialists, anti-racists/multiculturalists, feminists, environmentalists, and gay rights activists. In other words, the text choices are affirming for the politically correct, which includes the education establishment and almost all of the teachers.

Being ‘affirming’ does not mean being affirming for conservatives or liberals or for any others who are not of the Left. Nor does it mean being affirming for members of designated victim groups in ways that are politically incorrect. In a quite a few texts on the list (such as Hannie Rayson’s *Extinction* or Kate Grenville’s *The Lieutenant* or Hannah Kent’s *Burial Rites*), conservatives, liberals and others who are not of the Left are presented as the bad guys. In addition, you can find texts on the list that support gay people for their sexual preference (such as Cate Kennedy’s *Like a House on Fire*) but not for their conservative or liberal views, which many gay people have.

In addition, the term ‘global perspectives’ reflects the internationalism of the politically correct, which complements their interest in ‘diversity’. Race, ethnicity, class, gender and sexual preference are categories that transcend national boundaries. In regards to the application of the criteria of ‘affirming perspectives’ or ‘global perspectives’ they can be used to justify expressing a post-colonial distaste for things British by choosing texts by authors who are from different parts of the world or by authors who originated in different parts of the world but who settled in English-speaking countries. This is despite the fact that the subject being taught is ‘English’ so it is bound to feature writers who are of British origin

and who wrote in English. Call it an occupational hazard. There are going to be lots of them. But these criteria can be used to minimise their presence on the list. Furthermore, in regards to ‘affirming perspectives’, it is, for example, usually not enough that a text speaks positively about women. To the politically correct, the display of ‘affirming perspectives’ in regards to women equates with feminism. And to the millions of Australians from designated ‘victim groups’ (including women) who do not agree with political correctness and would desire more diverse views represented in the choice of texts, tough luck. They just have to accept what they are given, along with the rest of us.

The reference in the third criterion to the inclusion of texts by ‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ inevitably leads to the inclusion of post-colonial and other texts promoting the politically correct, left-wing interpretation of Australian history and contemporary society that is expressed through Aboriginal voices or the voices of white people who are sympathetic to these post-colonial or politically correct perspectives and causes. You will not see the inclusion of any Aboriginal or white voices, no matter how erudite or well-expressed, which challenge the politically correct orthodoxy in this area. In regards to texts by ‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’, the 2018 text list included the following:

- Tom Wright, *Black Diggers* (2015) (This is a play written by a white playwright who utilised the research by two Aboriginal Australians, Wesley Enoch and David Williams).

Although the politically correct in the education establishment are keen to include more Aboriginal texts in the future, the text section advisory panel and the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority have shown no sign of resorting to the inclusion of contrary voices to those that reiterate the orthodox post-colonial, politically

correct line on Aboriginal issues. These additional texts will inevitably be more of the same and present only one side of the debate as all the past choices of ‘Aboriginal’ texts have done.

It should also be noted that while only one of the texts can be interpreted as being by an Aboriginal author; there are two other choices on the list by white Australian authors who take the post-colonial, politically correct line on Australian history and contemporary society. They are:

- Kate Grenville, *The Lieutenant* (2008)
- Robyn Davidson, *Tracks* (1980).

Whether written by Aborigines or by whites, the ideological result is always the same: the promotion of political correctness.

In regards to the criterion regarding the inclusion of ‘texts by Australians’, there is an additional insistence that at least nine of the texts (possibly more) on the list of thirty-six must be by Australian authors (which is a very high proportion), and a stipulation that high school English faculties must select at least one text (and possibly more) by an Australian author among the four chosen for their school:

At least one [possibly more] of the selected texts must be by an Australian, as indicated on the text list.

In 2018, the text list had a whopping fifteen out of thirty-six texts by Australian authors. That’s 41.6 per cent, which is getting close to half the options.

An emphasis on studying Australian literature can appear reasonable at first glance, since it seems as though Australian students are being asked to study literature from their own country. But this is actually one of the most ideological requirements of all due to the virtual domination of contemporary Australian publishing and the arts by the politically correct Left. Choosing Australian literature usually means, in practice, choosing contemporary mainstream Australian

literature rather than nineteenth-century Australian literature. And contemporary mainstream Australian literature is invariably politically correct, and is often politically correct to the nth degree.

And since the official text list insists that at least one of the four texts (potentially more) that are chosen by high school English faculties must be ‘Australian’, this means that studying at least one text that reflects political correctness is compulsory.

The trend in mainstream publishing in Australia has seen it increasingly dominated by the politically correct Left. This means that the more modern the text is the more likely it is to reflect the ideology of political correctness. Going back to the nineteenth century or before the Second World War you may find writers like Henry Lawson or Banjo Patterson who express politically incorrect views, like traditional Australian nationalism. But what do we find when we examine the text list in 2018? All fifteen of the Australian texts on the list are modern, which means that all fifteen of them reflect political correctness. All were chosen from the period since the 1960s, which coincides with the rise of political correctness as a social movement that came to dominate mainstream Australian publishing and the arts. The Australian texts included on the list are the following:

- Kate Grenville, *The Lieutenant* (2008)
- Hannah Kent, *Burial Rites* (2013)
- Joan London, *The Golden Age* (2014)
- Christine Piper, *After Darkness* (2014)
- Amy Witting, *I for Isobel* (1989)
- Cate Kennedy, *Like a House on Fire* (2012)
- Hannie Rayson, *Extinction* (2015)
- Peter Skrzynecki, *Old/New World* (2007)
- Robyn Davidson, *Tracks* (1980)
- David Malouf, *Ransom* (2009)

- Anna Funder, *Stasiland* (2003)
- Kent MacCarter and Ali Lemer (eds), *Joyful Strains: Making Australia Home* (2013)
- Geraldine Brooks, *Year of Wonders* (2001)
- Joanna Murray-Smith, *Bombshells* (2001)
- Tom Wright, *Black Diggers* (2015).

In regards to the inclusion on the official text list of classics or works from the canon of great Western literature, this is covered by the criterion that demands a ‘balance of new and established works, including a Shakespearean text’, a ‘balance’ that, in practice, leans very heavily towards the ‘new’ rather than towards the classics, and the ‘new’ texts of interest to the politically correct people who select them are typically texts that are politically correct and left-wing. As well as the Australian texts listed above, the ‘new’ texts on the list are the following:

- Aravind Adiga, *The White Tiger* (2008)
- Ursula Le Guin, *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969)
- Alistair MacLeod, *Island* (2000)
- Sarah Polley (director), *Stories We Tell* (2012)
- Marjane Satrapi, *Persepolis* (2000)
- Katherine Boo, *Behind the Beautiful Forevers* (2012)
- Sean Penn (director), *Into the Wild* (2007)
- Clint Eastwood (director), *Invictus* (2009)
- Jhumpa Lahiri, *The Namesake* (2003)
- Margaret Atwood, *The Penelopiad* (2005)
- Fred D’Aguiar, *The Longest Memory* (1994)
- Malala Yousafzai with Christina Lamb, *I am Malala* (2013)
- Nigel Cole (director), *Made in Dagenham* (2010).

It should also be noted that unlike the insistence on including 'Australian' texts, there is no insistence that classics from the canon of great Western literature ('established works') be chosen by high school English faculties. It is merely optional, and quite a few high school English faculties make other choices.

By the way, the use of the term 'established works' to refer to texts from the canon of great literature is interesting. With so much postmodern hostility within the education establishment towards the canon, it seems that those who composed these criteria could not bring themselves to use the term 'canon', possibly for fear of infuriating their postmodern colleagues or transgressing their own ideological sensibilities, as if to officially mention the word would be conceding too much in the face of the demands for the inclusion of more texts from the canon by conservative and liberal commentators. Hence the use of the euphemism: 'established works'. And note the reference to the inclusion of a 'Shakespearean text' on the list. It sounds encouraging, but it is only one text on a list of thirty-six choices and it is not compulsory. Of course, it is better that it is included rather than not included. But few schools chose that option. Although the education establishment can claim that the inclusion of 'established works' represents an appreciation of their value, arguably there is also something deftly strategic about this reference to 'established works' and to a 'Shakespearean text'. It can seem as if it was, at least in part, also intended to help defend the text list from potential criticism from conservative and liberal commentators and members of the public who demand a greater representation of texts from the canon. The education establishment can confidently point to that criterion in their defence. While doing so, they will just omit to tell you that Australian texts (which are invariably politically correct) are compulsory but classic texts (including Shakespeare) are not. They may also omit to mention the ratio of 'new' to 'established works'.

Although there is some room for interpretation regarding a couple of texts as to whether they fit into the category of ‘established works’, I counted only eight out of the thirty-six as being ‘established works’, which left twenty-eight as being ‘new’ works, which are far more likely to be politically correct. And with such a great legacy of classics to choose from going back to Homer in ancient Greece in the eighth century BC, arguably the ratio could be the other way around, with twenty-eight classics compared to eight relatively new texts. So this is what the text selection authorities regard as ‘balance’? But, of course, the more new texts that can be chosen the more opportunity there is to choose texts that reflect political correctness. The further back you go before the 1960s, the less chance you have of selecting texts that reflect political correctness. You often have to make do with texts that are compatible with that world view rather than include texts that explicitly express politically correct values.

The ‘established works’ on the list would be the following:

- Mary Shelly, *Frankenstein* (1818)
- Euripides, *Medea* (431 BC)
- William Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure* (1604)
- John Donne, *Selected Poems* (late 1500s to early 1600s)
- Alfred Hitchcock (director), *Rear Window* (1954)
- Truman Capote, *In Cold Blood* (1965)
- George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949)
- Arthur Miller, *The Crucible* (1953).

All of these classics are worthy choices, and studying any one of them or, better still, studying all of them would enrich one’s education. These ‘established works’ are virtually the only opportunity for some ideological diversity other than political correctness. However, most of these established works can be interpreted or re-interpreted to sit with the politically correct world view or to sit generally with

the perspectives of the Left. Mary Shelly's *Frankenstein* is steeped in the romanticism of her era, which was critically disposed towards the values of the Enlightenment including its appreciation of the modern scientific method. Although romanticism originally fed into the rise of nationalism, fascism, Nazism and other forms of radical politics, more recently it has been appreciated positively by the Left as a precursor to postmodernism and environmentalism. Her novel celebrates nature and warns against the arrogance of tampering with it. The novel's main protagonist, the arrogant and intellectually precocious young scientist Victor Frankenstein sought to play God and create a new species of human from the body parts of the deceased, and for that transgression against nature he was destroyed by the monster he created, along with the destruction of his family and friends. Euripides' *Medea* was originally seen as a warning to civilised Greeks of the dangers of fraternising with volatile barbarians, namely Medea who is the wife of the hero Jason, with Medea being regarded as the enemy within the gates whose uncontrollable rage inflicted a heavy toll on her insensitive husband who tragically underestimated her capacity for barbaric brutality. In revenge for Jason's desire to marry a princess, Medea murdered the princess, the king, and the children she and Jason had produced. More recently the play has been reinterpreted by postmodern feminists as celebrating Medea as a strong woman who struck back against patriarchy. Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* pioneered the true crime novel while presenting views compatible with liberal law reform that sees criminals as made rather than born and as capable of rehabilitation. George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* presents a critique of Stalinist totalitarianism from the perspective of the Left, from that of a democratic socialist and Trotskyist sympathiser. However, the text is often treated by many teachers as broadly anti-totalitarian or dystopian and sometimes, mistakenly, as anti-Nazi. Meanwhile, many conservatives and liberals see Orwell's appreciation of the threats posed to reason, objectivity,

universal truth, the integrity of the individual, as well as his concerns about the politicisation of language, as compatible with their views. They are right in that sense. Orwell's views were diverse and appear to have been evolving, but when he wrote his last book *Nineteen Eighty-Four* he was still a man of the Left. Had he lived longer, he may have eventually changed sides. But that is speculation. If he had changed sides, and become a man of the Right, one can wonder whether he would have so frequently made it onto high school reading lists. Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* appears on the surface to be about the snowballing hysteria of a 'witch hunt' in Salem Massachusetts in 1692, when it was actually an allegorical attack on the McCarthyism of his own times and its crack down on communists and communist sympathisers in the entertainment industry, public administration and elsewhere. Miller was profoundly influenced by Marx and Freud (theorists beloved by postmodernists and the politically correct) and he used Marxist and Freudian theory to flesh out the motivations of many of his characters, such as those driven by capitalist greed or those driven by underlying or repressed desire. In addition, the heroes in the play are the characters who refused to cooperate with the authorities or those who originally worked for the authorities but changed sides to help those who were accused in the witch hunt. It is a text that treats the Right (not the Left) as oppressive.

That leaves only three texts out of the thirty-six that could be seen as somewhat ideologically neutral or as favourably disposed to conservative perspectives or as contrasting with political correctness. William Shakespeare appreciated the value of strong, just monarchical government. He was critical of rulers who fell short of these standards. In *Measure for Measure* he moralises to his audience about the hypocrisy of an interim ruler who imposed from above standards of morality that the interim ruler failed to live up to himself. Happiness for the realm is not restored until the unjust interim ruler is replaced by the return of the true ruler who governs with appropriate strength that

is tempered by flexibility, proportionality and mercy. In *Rear Window*, the director Alfred Hitchcock and his writer John Michael Hayes used an injured, wheelchair-bound, convalescing man staring out his rear window for entertainment to reflect on the moral complexities of voyeurism (whether it is for titillation, or whether it is public spirited and contributing to averting the suicide of a neighbour or to solving a capital crime). The filmmakers also expressed scepticism about marriage, seeing it as an antidote to loneliness but not necessarily as a path to happiness. John Donne, who was a contemporary of Shakespeare, wrote what was mostly unpublished poetry, usually for select audiences, which expressed his metaphysical philosophising about the nature of things, about love and human relationships, and about his seeking of religious truth at a time of great religious debate and uncertainty. He is famous for his frankness about delicate subjects related to sex and love, and for his complexity, including his unusual use of paradox, metaphor and simile. Being a man of his time, and being someone with the capacity for original thought, his musings on love were often far from what would currently be considered politically correct.

In addition, the film *Invictus* (2009) directed by Clint Eastwood was included as one of 'new' texts. It glorifies the historical figure Nelson Mandela who was the first black president of post-Apartheid South Africa, who was a major figure in overcoming Apartheid and in establishing a post-Apartheid South Africa. Mandela is a hero admired by those on the politically correct Left and many others across the political spectrum. Even though Clint Eastwood is a right-wing libertarian and has been a supporter of the Republican Party in the United States, this text is very compatible with the politically correct world view, which would have helped see it selected for the list. His more cinematically-accomplished films that more clearly reflect conservative, patriotic, or liberal views would, arguably, be unlikely to make the list. That is why I categorise this text as on the Left.

Thirty-three out of the thirty-six

This means that thirty-three out of the thirty-six texts on the 2018 list reflect political correctness or reflect a left-wing perspective or they can be interpreted or reinterpreted as compatible with the politically correct, left-wing world view. Let's run through these thirty-three texts in the order in which they appeared on the list in a manner that more clearly reveals the pattern of politically correct, left-wing ideological bias in text selection. As we do this, keep in mind the articulation of the ideology of political correctness provided in Chapter 4 and of postmodernism in Chapter 5:

- Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* (2008) is a novel by an Indian author educated in the West whose novel is set in India, so it can be considered post-colonial. The politically correct would also appreciate that it deals with inequality and poverty, with masters exploiting servants, with greedy and corrupt capitalists, and with the hatred of the rich by the poor and class struggle. The novel also treats Marxist revolutionaries as inspirational and criticises socialist politicians who are not true socialists.
- Kate Grenville's *The Lieutenant* (2008) (Australian text) is a novel that promotes the post-colonial, historical-revisionist approach to the settlement of New South Wales in the eighteenth century, which is the interpretation favoured by the politically correct Left. The novel is hostile to British imperialism and it promotes the notion of collective white guilt for the displacement of the Aborigines that is passed from generation to generation. In addition, it anachronistically celebrates as heroes her fictional characters who resemble pacifist political activists, conscientious objectors and social justice campaigners of the 1960s rather than more accurately resemble people

from the time in which the novel was set. The 1960s was the era regarded by the politically correct as the halcyon days of left-wing political activism and as providing the role models for future generations to follow. If you want political correctness in your historical fiction, this novel provides it comprehensively: pacifism, anti-racism, Marxist/socialist attitudes to class and inequality, feminism, environmentalism, and so on.

- Hannah Kent's *Burial Rites* (2013) (Australian text) is a postmodern feminist novel set in nineteenth century Iceland that argues that the last woman in that country to receive capital punishment for murder was not a villain but the victim of patriarchy and socio-economic inequality, discriminated against for being both poor and for being an intelligent woman. In this context, the novel also promotes notions of liberal law reform regarding the treatment of incarcerated prisoners and argues against capital punishment. Like Grenville's *The Lieutenant*, as a postmodern novel it tries to blur the distinctions between fiction and non-fiction to assert that the speculations of a novelist warrant similar consideration to that accorded to an evidence-based historian. Although the novel is set in the early nineteenth century, most issues on the feminist agenda during late twentieth century and early twenty-first century are given generous treatment, along with politically correct concepts about inequality, poverty and class. In addition, the novel expresses the Marxist-influenced view that Christianity is the legitimating ideology of an oppressive ruling class, as well as being the source of prejudice and superstition among ordinary folk. The novel also presents a New Age advocacy of herbal or alternative medicine.

- Ursula Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) is a novel celebrated by the politically correct Left as pioneering feminist science fiction. The novel was written during the tumultuous 1960s, which is, as I said earlier, a time celebrated by the politically correct as the halcyon days of left-wing political activism and Le Guin was one of those who were politically vocal at that time on racial and gender issues as well as against the Vietnam War. In her feminist novel, she presents a planet where individuals are androgynous until a brief monthly mating season when they can become one of either gender, and therefore alternate between each gender over their lifespan, making this an egalitarian planet free from gender roles and war. Her novel also presents a Marxist egalitarian society as a viable society.
- Joan London's *The Golden Age* (2014) (Australian text) is a finely crafted, sensitive coming-of-age story set in Perth in the early 1950s that is mainly about appreciating the sexuality and capacity for love of two individuals who are young and disabled by polio. The novel also makes a case for respecting the sexuality and romantic choices made by an attractive young widow who is a single mother. However, these themes are overlooked by most school teachers who focus on the politically correct comfort zone of the author's support for the large-scale, post-War immigration programme and the ethnically and culturally diverse migrants and refugees it brought to Australia. Although the novel is pro-immigration and in favour of multiculturalism, unlike most Australian writers who take these stands she shows a great affection for the Australians and for the Australia that existed before multiculturalism. In this way she stands out from those politically correct contemporary Australian writers who see Australia's past primarily through the ideological filter of their anti-racism.

- Christine Piper's *After Darkness* (2014) (Australian text) is an anti-racist, anti-nationalist, pro-multicultural and pacifist novel that draws attention to the mistreatment of the Japanese minority in Australia during the Second World War, many of whom were placed in internment camps. This novel can therefore be seen as reflecting an interpretation of Australia's past that is much appreciated by the politically correct Left. Those in the politically correct Left would also appreciate that the novelist is of mixed Australian and Japanese ancestry and is offering her (ethnic and female) perspective on Australian history and the treatment of the Japanese.
- Mary Shelly's *Frankenstein* (1818) ('established' work or classic) is one of the world's most famous horror stories. As well as being steeped in the nineteenth-century romanticism that can be appreciated as a precursor to postmodernism and environmentalism, the text also presents an attitude to criminality that appeals to the politically correct Left, which is that criminals are made rather than born, and are the products of neglect or deprivation or maltreatment or of a hostile environment. The monster that was created by Frankenstein was presented as neglected by its creator (or father figure) Victor Frankenstein, and as also suffering from the prejudice and hostility of the wider community due to his ugly appearance. It was therefore his environment that made the monster evil. This notion appeals enormously to politically correct teachers, and some even go too far and despise Victor Frankenstein as a villain. Unfortunately that is a mistake, since Frankenstein was a tragic figure (a character that is a mixture of good qualities and fatal flaws) who was the victim of his arrogance and intellectual precociousness. The audience is invited to learn from his mistakes, not hate him. Interestingly, the text is brimming with references to

great literature that inspired Mary Shelly, such as works by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Wolfgang Von Goethe, and especially John Milton's *Paradise Lost* and the ancient Greek legend of Prometheus. You can sense the joyousness that this young author felt at being inspired by great literature, and this can make one wish that young people in Australian high schools could receive comparable opportunities for cultural enrichment to those that she had.

- Amy Witting's *I for Isobel* (1989) (Australian text) is a semi-autobiographical novel that tells the story of a woman who eventually becomes a writer. This novel would appeal to the politically correct Left in the way the main character makes sense of her identity and the nature of the world in a manner that is profoundly influenced by feminism, Freudian psychoanalysis and Marxism. The novel includes a very favourable representation of a politically active communist. However, the main character does not join the communist party herself, preferring the emerging New Left of radical university students to the Old Left that was infiltrating the trade unions. Consequently, the novel celebrates the bohemian life-style of left-wing university students that came to be associated with the rise of the New Left and hippy counter-culture, which includes an appreciation of feminism, Marxism and the Eastern religion of Buddhism, which many in the New Left found to be a preferable alternative to Christianity. These, of course, are beliefs that later came to be understood as dimensions of political correctness. Interestingly, the main character finds great fulfilment in her appreciation of classic literature, which includes many texts by the 'dead white males' that seem to be being increasingly squeezed out of the English curriculum in favour of 'new' texts, especially 'new' texts by Australians

(including this text). The notable authors referred to in this novel include: Lord Byron, Percy Shelley, John Keats, Arthur Conan Doyle, Anthony Trollope, Charles Dickens, William Shakespeare, George Eliot (the nom de plume of a woman whose real name was Mary Anne or Marian Evans), Fyodor Dostoevsky, Wyston Hugh Auden and Stephen Spender. This novel therefore provides another sad reminder of what students are often missing in regards to their education due to the nature of the English text list.

- Cate Kennedy's *Like a House on Fire* (2012) (Australian text) is a short story collection by a feminist writer who focuses on ordinary life but views it through the ideological prism of feminism and political correctness. Almost everything that is politically correct and left-wing can be found here including almost any feminist issue you could mention, from negative body image issues to complaints about the traditional domestic division of labour in marriage to feminist critiques of mateship. You will also find Marxist concerns about inequality, economic exploitation and the alienation of workers from their dull repetitive tasks. You will also find expressions of pacifism and concerns about male tendencies towards violence and war, pollution and the spoiling of the environment, greenhouse gasses and global warming, multiculturalism, gay rights, animal rights, and more. Kennedy also criticises liberal individualism for promoting an ugly selfishness and ingratitude as well as insensitivity to the suffering of others. Meanwhile, she sees conservatism, which appreciates social institutions and values that existed before the Industrial Revolution and the modern era, as leading to cruel prejudices that should be treated as outdated, such as homophobia. In addition, she presents characters who lament the difficulties of

trying to live a politically correct, left-wing lifestyle in a commercial, materialistic, capitalist world. One is tempted to appreciate her stories as providing a snapshot of salient attitudes of the politically correct, left-wing literary and arts establishment during the early twenty-first century, and as providing what will probably be seen by generations to come as a revealing cultural artefact of the politically correct era.

- Alistair MacLeod's *Island* (2000) is a short-story collection by a Canadian author of Scottish ancestry whose stories about the Scottish ethnic minority are used to promote multiculturalism and assert a Scottish sense of identity that is anti-English.
- Euripides' *Medea*, (431 BC) ('established' work or classic) is an ancient Athenian play that has been given a postmodern feminist re-interpretation as a depiction of a strong woman who struck back against patriarchy by destroying the life of her husband who had wanted to marry another woman. Unfortunately, this approach can severely compromise the opportunity to use this play as a way into appreciating the cultural and intellectual richness of Classical Greece, an ancient civilisation that laid the foundations for Western civilisation.
- Hannie Rayson's *Extinction* (2015) (Australian text) is a politically correct, left-wing environmentalist play that puts the issue of combatting man-made climate change and protecting biodiversity at centre stage. A trio of flawed but noble environmentalists are pitted against the villainous coal industry and a charming coal industry executive who temporarily wins two of them over. However, the play concludes on an upbeat Marxist and environmentalist note by proclaiming that the ways of exploitive capitalism and the

coal industry are doomed and that renewables are the way of the future. Like Cate Kennedy's short story collection discussed above, this play can also be appreciated as a revealing cultural artefact as it can be seen as illustrating the domination of Australian theatre by political correctness in the early twenty-first century.

- Peter Skrzynecki's *Old/New World* (2007) (Australian text) is a poetry collection by a Polish post-War migrant/refugee whose poems can be appreciated by the politically correct as expressing migrant/refugee voices and reflecting multiculturalism.
- The documentary film *Stories We Tell* (2012) was written and directed by the actor, director, producer and left-wing political activist Sarah Polley. This biographical and semi-autobiographical postmodern film explores the illusiveness of truth in storytelling as a young woman, Sarah Polley, who is the product of her deceased mother's clandestine love affair, interviews family members and others to trace her family history and to clarify her identity. As the film progresses it subtly raises issues about the subjectivity of truth, the illusiveness of memory, the role of deceit (especially lying by omission), and asks who should be privileged to tell this story that involved or affected, multiple people who are of different ages or genders and who have different degrees of closeness to the main events in question. The film also raises issues about how the motivations of the filmmaker shape the pursuit of truth since the film is by a daughter seeking to know her identity. The politically correct will appreciate that the film was made by a woman and that there is a feminist subtheme regarding a vivacious, outgoing woman, the mother, who risked being unfairly judged by mainstream morality even though her family was

accepting and forgiving. This is an artistically accomplished and intellectually challenging film that raises pertinent issues of interest to postmodernists and many others, and does so without resorting to postmodern clichés or expressing a postmodern iconoclastic malevolence. It is by far the finest and most intriguing of the postmodern texts on offer.

- Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* (2000) is a memoir in the form of a graphic novel (or comic) that tells the autobiographical story of a girl born into a politically active, middle-class, Marxist extended family in Iran who becomes quite outspoken herself, so much so that later she must immigrate to Europe for her own safety, becoming someone who is similar to, but not quite, a refugee. The text celebrates Marxism and left-wing protest, including protesting against the pro-Western monarchical regime of the Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi and then protesting against the Islamic-fundamentalist regime of the Ayatollah Khomeini. The politically correct will appreciate that the text promotes Marxist, feminist, and pacifist values and it can be interpreted as indirectly making a case for taking in more Middle Eastern refugees, including Muslims. In addition, feminists would value that the author is a woman who produced literature in a medium (comics) traditionally dominated by men. Interestingly, in its protest against the dictatorial regime of the Shah and against the totalitarianism of Islamic fundamentalism, the text raises the issue of the injustice of being in a school system that only taught one point of view. I wonder if the members of the text section advisory panel and the officials at the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority were too caught up in the text's politically correct portrayal of Marxism, feminism, pacifism and refugees to have noticed that.

- Katherine Boo's *Behind the Beautiful Forevers* (2012) is a work of literary journalism about life in an Indian slum by a politically correct, left-wing American journalist whose investigative journalism has focused on poverty and social justice issues. In this book the politically correct will find what they like to hear to validate their views about the injustices of 'the age of global market capitalism' (globalisation) and 'economic liberalisation', where economic growth is represented as falling short of addressing the gap between the rich and the poor. Aware of the potential for the spread of negative stereotypes of Muslims in the West during the War on Terror, the story, set in Mumbai at a time impacted by Islamic fundamentalist terrorism, is told with the kind of contrasting depictions of Muslims that the politically correct currently regard as de rigueur. It is also told with a feminist sensibility regarding patriarchy and the oppression of women, as well as a Marxist/socialist sensibility that wonders why the poor do not unite against the rich instead of competing so vigorously against each other to eke out a living.
- Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* (1965) ('established' work or classic) is his masterpiece and a major work of twentieth-century literature. It deals with the murder of a family on an isolated farm by two career criminals who committed a robbery but wanted to leave no witnesses. As a true crime, non-fiction novel, it displays a degree of objectivity and documentary realism in its comprehensive approach to its subject matter that leaves it open to multiple interpretations by readers with differing perspectives. However, the author also skilfully attempted to position his audience, through his use of subtle or oblique arguments and through his careful placement of meaningful material at certain key points in

the text, to prompt his readers to favour a case for liberal law reform and against capital punishment. The novel would have a broad appeal but the politically correct would particularly appreciate the author's treatment of issues of socio-economic inequality, and the negative impact of social deprivation and of a traumatic childhood.

- Robyn Davidson's *Tracks* (1980) (Australian text) is a feminist and environmentalist memoir of the author's 1,700 mile journey across the Australian desert accompanied by three camels and a dog. Her quest for self-discovery and fulfilment in the wilderness is represented as breaking conventional social roles for women, and also as expressing a repudiation of Western civilisation with its materialism and commercialism, as well as celebrating left-wing libertarianism. She also rejects Western dress codes and etiquette, as well as the Western management of time and insistence on punctuality. She condemns most mainstream rural white Australians and their culture, especially its men, describing them as racist, sexist, and vulgar in the extreme. The hippies and left-wing activists whom she encountered are among the few whites who are presented as welcome exceptions to what she found to be the norm in the Australian outback. She also treated Aborigines as role models, seeking to adopt their ways, valuing the way they were attuned to their natural environment and how they interacted with it.
- The film *Into the Wild* (2007), written and directed by Sean Penn, tells the story of an ill-fated quest by a young left-wing idealist to forsake sinful Western civilisation and return to a more ethically-pure existence living off the land in the Alaskan wilderness. The film provides a vehicle to promote environmentalism, romanticism, Marxism, egalitarian socialism, the rejection of industrialisation and

the ‘American dream’, anti-materialism, anti-commercialism, and the repudiation of money and possessions. The film also promotes left-wing libertarianism and the hippie counter-cultural lifestyle. The main protagonist failed in his endeavour but died nobly while trying, becoming a martyr to the purity of his left-wing ideals. Like several characters in other texts on the list, the main protagonist in this text draws inspiration from classic literature, such as works by Leo Tolstoy, Jack London and Boris Pasternak, which is yet another sad reminder of the kind of elevating literary works that are currently poorly represented in the English course.

- The film *Invictus* (2009), directed by Clint Eastwood, celebrates as a hero and statesman a man admired by the politically correct Left and many others, Nelson Mandela, the first black president of South Africa. This anti-racist, anti-Apartheid subject matter and the glorification of Mandela are topics that are irresistible to the politically correct. It is an impressive, well-made film but it is not one of the director’s cinematic masterpieces, which suggests that it is the politically correct subject matter rather than the film’s cinematic artistry and historical significance that led to it making the text list.
- David Malouf’s *Ransom* (2009) (Australian text) is a postmodern re-working of Homer’s *Iliad*, which had told epic stories from the Trojan War and is the oldest text in the Western literary canon. However, the *Iliad* celebrated politically incorrect virtues like heroism and warned against human failings like pride, and it also presented its readers with powerful questions to ponder, such as whether you would prefer the short glorious life of a great warrior where you will be talked about for generations to come, or whether you would prefer a long, quiet, uneventful life and be

forgotten. Instead of presenting high school students with the *Iliad*, they get this text instead, a postmodern, politically correct, left-wing pacifist remake. This novel reflects the interests of postmodernists in reinterpreting classic texts to bring out what they believe are latent different meanings. Consequently, a range of postmodern ideas and concerns are expressed. This text raises postmodern sceptical issues about the nature of storytelling and historical truth. It also promotes a postmodern, post-structuralist sense of the wealthy and powerful being constrained by their social roles, and promotes a left-wing egalitarianism that is compatible with socialism by presenting a humble, peaceful, working-class man, who appreciates nature and has few possessions, as seeming to possess the secret to a happy life. The text would also appeal to the politically correct by arguing that a new kind of courage is to be found in breaking with social roles and conventions and in adopting humility and seeking to connect with your enemy's common humanity. Postmodern literature has its place. But when it is used to replace a classic, you cannot help feeling cheated. However, with many texts on the list being set for comparison, a worthy exercise would have been to compare the *Iliad* with its postmodern, politically correct remake, which would have highlighted the virtues and shortcomings of both texts in highly educational ways. For example, while the *Iliad* presented interventionist Greek gods meddling in the fates of men, this postmodern rewrite secularises the subject matter. By contrast, *Ransom* has the action taking place in an existentialist and environmentalist context. It is existentialist in the manner in which the text draws attention to the prevalence and unpredictability of chance. It is environmentalist in the sense that it treats the eternal cycle

of life as inescapable for both the humble and powerful. But there is little chance of anything as educational as that comparison happening in an education system that is obsessively promoting political correctness.

- Anna Funder's *Stasiland* (2003) (Australian text) is a work of literary journalism and social history that attempts to capture the nature and atmosphere of life in totalitarian East Germany before the revolution of 1989 that swept away this social experiment in communism. To Funder, the enormous state security apparatus, the Stasi, characterised this society and made it the most pervasive and invasive police state ever created. In this text, this regime is criticised from the perspective of the Left, from the perspective of a left-wing libertarian influenced by feminism and of a human rights lawyer (which was Funder's formal training). Although she criticised communist totalitarianism she is no admirer of capitalism, which is presented as a source of inequality and waste. This non-fiction text presents three forms of writing: interviews with former victims of the Stasi and with former Stasi perpetrators, a travelogue of eastern Germany in transition, and succinct histories of key historical events that provide useful background information that make the other dimensions of the text more intelligible. All of these forms of writing are handled extremely well. In interviews with the author, she reveals herself to be far more radical in her politically correct, left-wing views than she appears to be in the text, indicating that she showed an admirable restraint appropriate to dealing with the historical subject matter. Readers of this text have the opportunity to appreciate quality writing and learn some history at the same time. Along with Joan London's *The Golden Age*, this is one of the most impressive of the Australian texts on offer.

- George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) ('established' work or classic) is his masterpiece and a major work of twentieth-century literature. It presents a critique of Stalinist totalitarianism from the perspective of the Left, from that of a democratic socialist and Trotskyist sympathiser. It has provided many well-known concepts about political oppression that have entered the popular consciousness, and provided many terms or idiomatic phrases that have been added to the English language, like 'Big Brother is watching you', 'Newspeak', 'Thought Police', 'thoughtcrime', 'Two Minutes Hate', 'Hate Week', and 'doublethink', making this novel a virtually indispensable component of a well-rounded high school education in literature. The text is often favoured by the politically correct who appreciate its stand against totalitarianism and its warnings of the potential for a dystopian future. They see it as having much to say against those whom they oppose. This is largely because many on the politically correct Left fail to see that the text can be regarded as having many relevant things to say about the character and behaviour of the politically correct Left in more recent times. When Orwell wrote *Nineteen Eighty-Four* he was concerned with issues of his own times, such as the tendency of so many avant-garde British intellectuals and left-wing political activists in the 1930s and 1940s to become so beguiled by Stalinism that they naively supported a system that, if instituted in Britain, would make them number among its casualties. Unfortunately, Orwell died relatively young, in 1950 at the age of forty-six, at a time when he was at the peak of his literary powers.

But had Orwell lived longer, one wonders what he would have made of the adoption of postmodern concepts by educational elites that are hostile to the concepts he appeared

to value most, such as rationality, objectivity, empiricism, and universal truth.

Had Orwell lived longer, one wonders what he would have made of political correctness and its assault on the integrity of the English language, a destruction wrought in the name of what are claimed to be noble causes (which was also the case with communism), where the use or non-use of particular words is dictated by decree.

Had Orwell lived longer, one wonders what he would have made of the tendency of the politically correct to reinterpret history through the prism of their ideology to produce interpretations that would be unrecognisable to those who were actually there.

Had Orwell lived longer, one wonders what he would have made of the classrooms where images of President Donald Trump are projected from overhead projectors to stir scorn and derision from students who have been encouraged to think in hateful ways by their schools and the left-wing media such as the ABC.

Had Orwell lived longer, one wonders what he would have made of the tendency of the politically correct elites to stir up the politically correct mob to turn on and destroy the reputations and careers of those who say something politically incorrect.

Had Orwell lived longer, one wonders what he would have made of the politically correct use of terms found in the text selection criteria, such as ‘diversity’, with this being a diversity that limits rather than accommodates the diversity of ideas, or of ‘affirming perspectives’, which are affirming for the few (the politically correct) and not for the many.

Had Orwell lived longer, one wonders what he would have

made of the concept of gender fluidity, where one has to accept two contradictory ‘truths’ about gender, one that is determined by one’s senses and the other that is determined by those in authority who dictate to others how to think and what to think and when to think.

These are some of the concerns raised in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* that have current applications. I hope that the politically correct Left does not recognise that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* can be used to expose the corruption of the politically correct project. In the current politically correct era it is potentially a subversive text. It is a text that can be used to critique the totalitarianism of Stalinism and it can also be used to critique the totalitarian inclinations of political correctness. Let’s hope that the education establishment does not wake up to this.

- Kent MacCarter and Ali Lemer (eds), *Joyful Strains: Making Australia Home* (2013) (Australian text) is intended to promote racially and ethnically-diverse immigration, refugee settlement and multiculturalism. It consists of twenty-seven accounts of settlement experiences by what are presented to the readers to be a diverse range of migrants and refugees from different backgrounds, but most of them are far from diverse in their expressions of political correctness. They all seem to be drawn from the same ideological milieu. For example, a number of the writers come from politically correct academic elites who could not resist the opportunity to show off their appreciation of postmodernism, even name-dropping some of their favourite postmodern theorists. Some accounts are charming and endearing. But many accounts present the kind of ambivalent or critical assessments of Australia that the politically correct Left like to hear, presenting Australians as racist and arguing

that multiculturalism is the best thing about this country. It would have been easy to choose twenty-seven other people from the same backgrounds of those included and derive a completely different set of assessments of Australia.

- Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* (2003) is a multicultural novel set in the United States. An Indian/Bengali author presents an Indian/Bengali perspective on the migrant experience that features the contrasting attitudes to assimilation and acculturation of first and second generation migrants. Although the Indian/Bengali migrant family depicted is proudly middle class, status markers used by them to signal their respectability include showing a positive appreciation of both Marxism and classic literature, most notably the author Nikolai Gogol.
- Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* (1953) ('established' work or classic) is an allegorical play that uses a witch hunt in Salem Massachusetts in 1692 to critically comment on the McCarthyism of Miller's own era. Postmodernists and the politically correct may also appreciate that the playwright was profoundly influenced by Marxism and Freudian psychoanalysis in his treatment of many of the characters. Notably, the play can be interpreted as providing the opportunity to teach students that it is the Right, rather than the Left, which is oppressive and intolerant of other views. The play also gives politically correct, left-wing teachers the opportunity to follow the play's lead and praise those who bravely stand up for the victims of political intolerance. It is probable that the members of the text selection advisory panel and of the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority that approved this text appreciated these messages as well.

Rather than being attributable to 'paranoia', as some teachers

have claimed, the threat from communist traitors and spies in the early stages of the Cold War was real, since, for example, the United States had just experienced what was arguably the greatest espionage disaster of all time due to traitors and spies who stole the secret to making an atomic bomb and smuggled it to the Soviet Union, which detonated its own devastating nuclear device in 1949. However, there were also numerous excesses and injustices committed against people for having particular left-wing beliefs. Senator Joe McCarthy deserves to be denounced for his reckless, irresponsible accusations, to be condemned along with the expressions of political intolerance made by the House Un-American Activities Committee. Lives were unfairly set back or ruined, and careers were unjustly damaged or sometimes destroyed. As Miller was acutely aware, this mistreatment was notable in regards to of a number of creative people in the arts and entertainment industry, especially in regards to the notorious ‘Hollywood blacklist’.

Fortunately, the excesses of the McCarthyist era were short lived and many of those who suffered rebuilt their lives and a number of them, like Miller who numbered among those called to face the House Un-American Activities Committee, went on to have great success. By the 1960s, it was the Left that was ascendant and it soon became dominant. Increasingly, it was creative people on the Right, especially the politically incorrect, who suffered from political intolerance and were marginalised and vilified, a situation that worsened during the early twenty-first century. This unjust circumstance in the arts and entertainment industry has continued far longer and has been far more effective than anything suffered by the Left during the 1950s. This can be measured in the kinds of texts that you don’t see as much as in the ideological content

of the texts that you do see. There were close parallels to these American historical trends in Australia, where the Left became even more dominant here than in the United States. As you read through this summary of the ideological content of the text list, you will notice the complete absence of ‘new’ or new ‘Australian’ texts on the list that either promote conservative or liberal views, or that challenge political correctness. This suggests that in Australia, the recent McCarthyism of the Left against the Right has been far more effective than the historic McCarthyism of the Right against the Left ever was, and the English text list is one example of this intolerance. McCarthyism was bad, but during the height of the McCarthyist era, Miller was able to write, produce and publish a play attacking it. One could speculate that if an Australian playwright, perhaps inspired by Miller, wrote a play about the marginalisation or oppression of the politically incorrect in the arts and entertainment industry, it would probably never be performed and never be published by a mainstream publisher. It would certainly never get on the English text list. The presence of *The Crucible* on the text list raises issues about political intolerance that the text selection advisory panel and the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority may have never anticipated. And currently, they appear to be part of the problem when they could, instead, choose to be part of the solution.

- Geraldine Brooks’ *Year of Wonders* (2001) (Australian text) may take the prize for the text that ticks the most politically correct, left-wing boxes. Set in the seventeenth century in the Derbyshire village of Eyam, which is known as the ‘Plague village’ because it quarantined itself from 1665–1666 to contain a local outbreak of the Plague, the novelist uses this historical backdrop to present and promote a wide range

of politically correct, left-wing values from her own time, especially feminism, with her adherence to these values appearing to be deep-seated and unquestioning.

Since only a few facts were known about the real history of Eyam, the novelist felt she was at liberty to fill in the blanks. What resulted was yet another politically correct, left-wing text on the list that takes liberties with history. It is therefore misleading if teachers and students use this text as an avenue towards understanding the past (which many classrooms are prone to do).

Although set in the middle of the seventeenth century in a small rural village, the novelist managed to anachronistically weave into the story many principles and issues of late-twentieth-century feminism. This is done mostly, but not exclusively, through her depiction of the main character who appears to represent the novelist's idea of the modern, liberated late-twentieth-century woman. She is a young, working-class woman from a deprived background who (amazingly) taught herself to read from scratch and without formal education, managing this feat while also being a single mother, who even adopts another child, and who refuses to marry for financial security because she refuses to settle for anything less than what she deserves in a man. (Remember, this story is set in the middle of the seventeenth century in a small rural village, at a time before the extensive provision of state social welfare when poor single women struggled to survive and usually had to marry to do so.) In this context, the novel also presents a feminist critique of marriage as an institution that serves the interests of patriarchy, subjecting women to an exploitive domestic division of labour and possibly to domestic violence. Instead, this woman becomes an independent career woman, finding her vocation as a

medical professional, as a midwife and as a specialist in herbal medicine. By the end of the novel she has also achieved an understanding of Latin and Arabic, which allowed her to study complex medical texts. She is therefore shown to have broken into the medical profession, a realm of work dominated by men. This is quite an accomplishment, but there is even more to this woman's feminist achievements. She is also capable of the hard toil involved in the kind of physical work reserved for men, turning her capable hands to the backbreaking labour of mining. (Is there anything this feminist superwoman can't do?)

Other late-twentieth-century feminist issues raised in the novel include the need for women's refuges for women fleeing domestic violence, highlighting the risks to women's health from illegal abortions, promoting the increased presence of women in the arts and literature, promoting a loyalty to the sisterhood that transcends loyalties to men, and body image issues. There are also issues related to sexual politics, such as criticising the tendency of men to see women as sex objects. However, the novel also asserts the right of women to be assertive and to express their sexual desire and desire for satisfaction, with some women choosing to be single and take sexual partners when they desire while other women (like the main character) choose long-term relationships. In addition, with several characters favoured in the novel, the text appears to present the transition from feeling attraction to having sex in a manner that follows protocols approved of by late-twentieth-century feminists (which enable men to avoid potential accusations of sexual harassment).

But there is more to this novel's political correctness.

The novel also presents a Marxist appreciation of class and

socio-economic inequality, such as by celebrating the virtue of the working class and by denouncing the ruling class or aristocracy as not deserving its status and privileges, as well as by showing a politically correct pacifist disdain for supposed war heroes. This is evident with the depiction of this working-class woman, and other like-minded characters, remaining in the village to heroically fight the Plague with herbal medicines while the local aristocrat (a decorated war hero from the English Civil War) turned tail and ran, abandoning his servants and community. Meanwhile, another female character from a privileged background, who befriends the working-class main character and who had married for love rather than for wealth, expresses the kind of egalitarian attitudes that would be approved of by the politically correct.

The local capitalist, who is represented by the man with a grave digging business that is booming due to the numerous casualties of the Plague, is presented as greedy and exploitive and as taking advantage of other people's misery to make a dishonourable profit. However, liberation is at hand. In what seems to echo a Marxist-Leninist fantasy, the working class rises up against the exploitive capitalist to brutally depose and execute him after a people's trial by a people's court.

Like so many other texts on the list with historical settings before the 1960s, this novel celebrates characters who anachronistically resemble the left-wing political activists of the 1960s or of the author's own more recent time. When the main character and her best friend turn to mining, it is to campaign to save a woman in need, thereby enabling the novel to make the case that great satisfaction in life comes to those who campaign for social justice. The novel also legitimates the values of the hippy counter culture of the

1960s when it presents positive representations of the use of illicit drugs, namely opium. The main character uses illicit drugs and then chooses to cease using them without suffering any adverse consequences.

Although the novel is set in 1665–1666, shortly after England had experienced eleven disappointing and oppressive years of republicanism and recently celebrated the restoration of the monarchy, in November 1999, around the time Brooks wrote her novel, Australia had experienced the republican referendum that was defeated, which greatly disappointed the politically correct. Coincidentally, Brooks had her main character express an egalitarian irreverence towards the King.

But there is more to this novel's political correctness.

While many who are on the Left in the early-twenty-first century follow the lead of the postmodernists and are critical of the Enlightenment, previously this was not the case. There have been, and still are, many on the Left who see their beliefs as in tune with many of the values of the Enlightenment, such as its rationality, secularism, and its optimism about creating a better world. This novelist appears to be one of those leftists. Consequently, she shows an appreciation of Enlightenment values and uses them to make a case against Christianity.

The Enlightenment was an era of European history, from approximately 1680 to 1780, which popularised the recently-emerged modern scientific method, empiricism, and the use of reason to generate and apply verifiable knowledge about the nature of the world. This produced a displacement of Christian belief in favour of more secular attitudes to the acquisition of knowledge and to the value placed on this

knowledge. The appreciation of Enlightenment values was primarily found among the aristocracy and the upper middle class. However, these attitudes did filter down to other classes, but very slowly and in a manner that was far from uniform. Remote or isolated rural communities were often bypassed by such thinking. This novel predates the Enlightenment considerably since the story takes place from 1665–1666. It also takes place in the kind of small rural village that would probably have been unlikely to have been much affected by Enlightenment values, even at a much later date. However, the novelist uses the Enlightenment values shared by key characters in the village to justify the novel's anti-Christian messages even though the date and location of the setting of the novel makes the novelist's use of Enlightenment values somewhat problematic.

The novel uses Enlightenment values in its negative depiction of the Christian community as mostly superstitious, sometimes dangerously so. One exception is the main character who is a working-class woman. Another exception is the local Rector who is used to represent an enlightened character who is decidedly un-Christian in many of his attitudes. The Rector can be seen as representing enlightened, educated, middle-class professionals (which is the novelist's own class) more so than representing a member of a religious order.

The novel makes the case that the conventional or mainstream medicine of the time is male-dominated, narrow-minded, exploitively expensive, and ineffective. It then uses Enlightenment values to argue in favour of the kind of New Age herbal medicine that has an ancient history but was later popularised in the hippy era and appreciated by many of the politically correct. The local herbal healers are

good-natured, egalitarian women who are also somewhat sexually liberated and eccentric. In the panic generated by the Plague, they are accused of being witches and murdered by a superstitious lynch mob, becoming martyrs in what the author refers to as the struggle of ‘God versus Nature’. Their herb garden is taken over by the main character of the novel and her best friend, who keep this female tradition going. The main character practises herbal medicine to become an accomplished herbal healer. Since this is fiction, the novelist can depict this New Age approach to medicine, rather than others, as effective.

But there is even more to this novel’s political correctness. This novel was published in 2001. That means that Brooks was probably writing it at the very end of the twentieth century or at the very beginning of the twenty-first century. This was during a build-up in tensions between Islamic fundamentalism and the West that reached the point when Osama Bin Laden’s Al Qaeda terrorist organisation launched major terrorist attacks on New York and Washington in September 2001 that killed almost 3,000 people and precipitated the War on Terror. As this unease between radical Islam and the West intensified, the politically correct were increasingly concerned about countering what they labelled as ‘Islamophobia’. Although Brooks was writing a novel set in a tiny village in England in the seventeenth century, she did not let this stop her using this novel to have her say on this issue. In a manner that stretches credibility, she went out of her way to include a positive Islamic character, who is sophisticated, cultured and highly educated, to dispel late-twentieth-century negative stereotypes about Islam. Near the close of the novel, Brooks had her main character, the working-class woman from a village in rural England, marry

a polygamous Islamic doctor to settle peacefully in the Islamic world in Oran in Algeria where she finds freedom, career satisfaction and feels appreciated.

If you are asking yourself how a text like this could ever be selected for the text list, you are asking the wrong question. You should be asking how a text like this could ever be overlooked. It is tailor-made for today's English curriculum. (Remember, Homer's *Iliad* did not make it to the list, but this text did.)

- Joanna Murray-Smith's *Bombshells* (2001) (Australian text) is a feminist play centred around six female characters that presents familiar feminist complaints about patriarchy. Some of these characters are very bitter and on occasions men cop quite a bashing. Notably, the institution of marriage comes under sustained and heated feminist attack. The play argues that the feminist revolution is unfinished. Despite what has been achieved for women, there is still a long way to go to fully achieve their liberty from oppression by men.
- Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad* (2005) is a postmodern, feminist, reworking of Homer's *Odyssey*, which had told epic stories from the aftermath of the Trojan War and is the second oldest text in the Western literary canon. (This is the second postmodern, politically correct reworking of Homer on the list. Is there a pattern? Why can't we study Homer's original texts?) Interestingly, the tone of Atwood's postmodern, feminist treatment of this classic text is noticeably bitter compared to that of Malouf's postmodern pacifist re-working of the *Iliad*. Postmodernists, including postmodern feminists, are often politically opposed to texts in the canon of great Western literature that present politically incorrect values as normal or virtuous.

Postmodern feminists would see the *Odyssey* as exhibiting patriarchal values that normalise the subordination or oppression of women. Many postmodern feminists would see this ancient and revered text as a challenge to be countered or preferably replaced by a politically correct version of the story. The rewriting of this ancient text to make it accord with postmodern, politically correct feminist values is not only a literary act but also a political act. It is a contribution to changing what the politically correct Left regard as the dominant male discourse, thereby chipping away at the paradigm that they regard as oppressing women. Atwood's novel can be seen as an expression of political activism by a writer seeking to advance the feminist cause.

This could be seen as suggesting that the choice of Atwood's novel over the *Odyssey* for the text list can be regarded as a political act, one intended to support the efforts of Atwood, and others, to overthrow what feminists perceive to be the dominant male discourse. This contrasts with the choice of texts being for educational reasons, to enrich young minds with quality literature and to provide them with a well-rounded appreciation of the history of literature, which would include an appreciation of politically correct and postmodern texts but not be confined to politically correct and postmodern texts.

- Tom Wright's *Black Diggers* (2015) (Aboriginal Australian text) deals with the little-known subject of the presence of Aboriginal servicemen in the Australian army during the First World War. The play is postmodern, post-colonial, and done in the style of Brechtian theatre, which is a Marxist form of theatre centred on the idea that a play should present an argument that is appreciated intellectually and that the purpose of a play is to educate the audience and

inspire them to participate in political action for social justice. The politically correct will appreciate that the play puts racism at the centre of Australian history and covers most of the issues on the agenda of twenty-first century, left-wing Aboriginal politics.

- Fred D'Aguiar's *The Longest Memory* (1994) is arguably the text on the list that most closely follows postmodern, post-colonial principles and formulas. Written by an African-Guyanese-British author educated mainly in the West, the novel, which is set mostly in the American South in 1810, deals with slavery, arguing in Freudian/Jungian psychoanalytical terms that the experience of slavery entered the collective unconscious of African-Americans, to be passed from generation to generation, and this helps to explain their predicament ever since. The text is post-colonial in the manner in which it puts racism at the centre of American history and postmodern in the manner in which the novel does not provide a linear plot; instead incidents in the novel are told and retold from multiple perspectives to reflect the postmodern concept that truth is relative. However, the text does this in a manner that does not go so far in its relativism as to compromise the novel's overriding anti-racist messages. For many postmodernists, some truths are more relative than others and these postmodernists tend to be noticeably protective of their core beliefs. In addition, as a postmodern, post-colonial, anti-racist, Marxist, and feminist text it deliberately seeks to address supposed 'silences' and 'omissions' in history by giving voice to characters that are black, or women, or black women, or from poor working-class backgrounds. Notably, the novel celebrates a young (white) female character who supposedly represents an abolitionist from that era but

who more accurately resembles a radical left-wing political activist from the 1960s. She is presented as a role model to be admired or emulated by others.

- Malala Yousafzai with Christina Lamb, *I am Malala* (2013), is a non-fiction text that tells the story of a teenage left-wing political activist in Northern Pakistan who is a chip off the old block of her left-wing political activist father. Politically correct, left-wing teachers and others would appreciate that these two campaigned in a Muslim country for universal education (which includes girls), and on feminist issues, and for pacifist causes in a country riven by militant Islamic fundamentalism and sectarian violence, and did this while remaining devout Muslims. Malala and her father were incredibly brave, showing their courage by publicly taking a stand against the brutal and ruthless Taliban in a region that had become its stronghold. This resulted in an assassination attempt on Malala that nearly killed her, generating well-deserved world-wide sympathy as well as the fame that gave her an enormous global audience. It also forced the family to become refugees. The text (which was so obviously written almost entirely by the tertiary-educated and highly experienced foreign correspondent Christina Lamb despite the attribution to the teenage Malala as the principal writer) mostly presents a very detailed account of Pakistani history and politics that the politically correct would appreciate since it attributes significant blame to US foreign policy for the rise of the Taliban. The politically correct will also appreciate that the text celebrates left-wing political activism as a vocation while promoting feminism and refugee causes. It is another politically correct, left-wing text on the list that presents a young left-wing political activist as a role model to be admired or emulated by others.

- Nigel Cole (director) *Made in Dagenham* (2010) is a film that celebrates a strike in 1968 by 187 women sewing-machinists in the Ford motor car production plant in Dagenham, on the outskirts of London, which provided the catalyst for landmark legislation in 1970 that guaranteed the principle of equal work for equal pay. The film overtly promotes feminism, Marxism and class struggle, while being critical of a company that represents the global reach of American capitalism, and critical of trade union officials who were yet to get on board with feminist causes. In addition, this is yet another politically correct, left-wing text on the list glorifying the left-wing political activism of the 1960s. It is also yet another politically correct left-wing text on the list presenting a young left-wing political activist (the main character) as a role model to be admired or emulated by others.

As you can see from this ideological survey of the text list so far, it is undeniably overwhelmingly politically correct and left-wing. Australia is a democratic, pluralistic society, but, as far as the education establishment is concerned, it can seem that political correctness is the official state ideology. While several texts favourably appreciated by the politically correct can be interpreted as having latent messages that reverberate against political correctness in ways that the politically correct probably did not anticipate, only three texts on the list can be considered to be somewhat ideologically neutral or as reflecting conservative perspectives or as presenting perspectives incompatible with political correctness. And in the context of the ideological hegemony of political correctness, they seem compellingly subversive:

- William Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* (1604) ('established' work or classic) is, as I said earlier, a play that presents a warning about the hypocrisy of a ruling elite imposing a morality from above that it is not willing

or able to live up to itself. Think about that for a moment. Isn't that one of the major criticisms that can be levelled at political correctness? Shakespeare was a conservative in his day, but in the politically correct era, he looks increasingly subversive.

- John Donne, *Selected Poems* (late 1500s to early 1600s) ('established' work or classic) was, as I said earlier, a contemporary of Shakespeare who wrote poetry mostly for select audiences, and much of it was unpublished in his time, so he dodged the censors of his day. This gave him the latitude to think freely and exhibit great originality. Arguably, this can be seen as a message for our times regarding freedom of thought in a society where creativity in the mainstream culture is increasingly constrained by the demands of political correctness, and it can also be seen as suggesting that the most original and most interesting writing is probably not to be found in what is currently the mainstream.
- Alfred Hitchcock (director), *Rear Window* (1954) ('established' work or classic) is, as I said earlier, a film about the morality of voyeurism that also provided a critical commentary on marriage, presenting it as an antidote to loneliness but not necessarily a path to happiness. The director and his writer appear to have been fairly free to speculate on the nature of humanity as they saw it in order to create an entertaining, insightful and thought-provoking portrayal of humanity without the inhibitions imposed on their creativity by the ideological constraints of political correctness. Consequently, the depiction of relationships in the film is far from politically correct. By contrast to the chorus of ideologically-driven feminist texts on offer and their repetitive feminist critiques of

marriage, this text offers something different. It sees marriage as something imposed on men by women, an institution that can blunt the adventurous instincts of some confident, self-assured men and ultimately leave them trapped in a domesticity that leaves them miserable. This is evident in the way that the main character resists the attempts of his girlfriend to manoeuvre him into marriage. At last, another point of view, a text that is not repeating the oh-so-familiar orthodoxies of political correctness! This film has infuriated politically correct, left-wing film critics for decades, which some might see as a sign that the filmmakers were onto something good.

Observable patterns and their consequences

In regards to the entire text list, a number of patterns emerge.

One of the great ironies of this ideologically-biased text selection by education authorities is that they are denying Australian students sufficient exposure to the kind of inspiring literary classics that, in the past, enriched the lives of so many well-educated individuals, including many of the writers who are currently on the text list. In fact, exposure to this literature was one of the major factors that made these individuals well educated. To develop an appreciation of quality literature, like Shakespeare, it helps enormously if students are introduced to this literature at high school. High school also presents a golden opportunity to introduce students to the major historical periods, trends and highlights in the history of literature so students come away with a sense of perspective on the development of literature over the centuries, starting with Homer and progressing to the present. This is what schools are for. High schools should be doing this and doing it well. Unfortunately, this is either not happening or not happening in any way that could be considered adequate. That is why it is possible in Australia to graduate from high school with high

grades and not know very much about literature. It's heartbreaking. All that money spent on education for not much of a result. The students and their tax-paying (and possibly school-fee-paying) parents are being cheated.

At the beginning of the year, when I meet my new students, some of them excitedly tell me that they will be studying a literary classic, like, for example, George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. They usually also tell me that they had heard so much about it and they can't wait to read it and be taught about it. None of my new students have ever told me they are excited to be studying a contemporary text about feminism or climate change. Similarly, parents are excited for their children when they are to be taught a classic, such as a Shakespearean text, in the belief that their child is being well educated. Some of these parents like to sit in on the lessons that I give their children so they can learn along with their son or daughter. This never happens when I am tutoring students on a contemporary text about feminism or climate change. Students are being denied sufficient exposure to the kind of classic literature that makes people feel well educated. Students are being denied sufficient exposure to the kind of classic literature that the very text list itself proves is capable of inspiring writers, including many of the writers who are on the list. Students need this type of education, especially the creative students with a flair for writing that should be cultivated while at school. Students also need this education to develop cultural literacy, which is the ability to understand and participate fluently in one's culture. This includes the ability to understand classical literary allusions like 'Trojan horse' from the *Odyssey* by Homer and the *Aeneid* by Virgil, or to appreciate Shakespearean idiomatic phrases, such as his reference in *Othello* to jealousy as being a 'green-eyed monster'. In terms of literary allusions, references to the contemporary feminist and environmentalist writers who are well represented on the text list just won't do.

There is also an opportunity cost. For every, routinely similar

politically correct text that is studied, there is a classic text or meretricious contemporary text that could have been studied but was not studied. For example, those students at high schools whose English faculties made them study William Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* and Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* along with the paired texts of Anna Funder's *Stasiland* and George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* did very well. These students were presented with four significant examples of quality literature from the past and present that taught them something insightful about the nature of their world and showed them how accomplished writers from different periods in the history of literature can express interesting ideas in a literary fashion. Meanwhile, students whose high school English faculties made them study Kate Grenville's *The Lieutenant* and Hannie Rayson's *Extinction*, along with the paired texts of Fred D'Aguiar's *The Longest Memory* and Tom Wright's *Black Diggers* did not do well at all. These students finished the year having been exposed to a great deal of political correctness and not much else.

Furthermore, the ideologically narrow pool from which almost all the texts are drawn denies young people exposure to a range of significant ideas, and the opportunity to learn what these ideas are, or even to become aware that these ideas exist. This robs these young people of the chance to develop vital knowledge of the spectrum of ideas that have inspired creative people and that have influenced history and helped shape their contemporary world. It denies these young people the chance to learn about the spectrum of ideas that can help them to understand the world in which they live and the political debates that characterise our times or that characterised past times. Postmodernism and political correctness should be part of that education but not constitute the whole story. The ideological narrowness of the text list is profoundly anti-educational. It can seem that effective learning has been sacrificed on the altar of politically correct, left-wing social engineering. This is another reason why it

is possible in Australia to graduate from high school with high grades and not know nearly as much as one could or should. All that money spent on education for not much of a result. This ideological narrowness represents a dereliction of duty as educators.

As you read through my review of the text list you would have noticed that it is saturated with feminism. It reminds me that the first glass of freshly-squeezed lemon juice tastes sweet, but after the tenth glass in a row it seems bitter and you crave something else. It is important that feminist literature be covered, but it should not dominate the list at the expense of the inclusion of so many other worthy ideas and perspectives. It should be a case of teaching students a feminist text and using that as an opportunity to teach them about feminism and feminist literature and then, after that, moving on to teach them something else that is important for them to know. That would be an educational approach to dealing with feminism and feminist literature. But that is not the approach currently being taken in the education system as you can plainly see by the ideological bias of the text list. What we currently have is something like an education system professing to be teaching art history by only teaching abstract art and ignoring the Renaissance and the Baroque and every other significant art period that students need to appreciate.

The ideological biases of the text selection panel and relevant authorities in the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority are blatant, so much so that I pretty much know what to expect in a new text before I have even opened the cover. In addition, so many of the texts chosen by them are so doctrinaire in their political correctness that when I begin reading a new text to prepare my notes to help my students I often have the feeling of: Here we go again! In regards to many of the Australian texts on offer, so much of the ideological content, messages and issues raised in these texts are utterly predictable. They are often so similar in their ideological content that sometimes it seems that you could take two of the Australian texts

and swap the names of the authors on the cover of each book and not compromise the ideological integrity of either author to even the slightest degree. You could do this with Hannah Kent and Geraldine Brooks, or you could do it with Hannie Rayson and Cate Kennedy. They appear to be in complete agreement on everything. I'm sure if they met at a party they would get along *Like a House on Fire*. When I provide my students with essential background knowledge to understand a text on the list, I so often find myself explaining to my students (yet again) the meaning of pacifism, Marxism/socialism, anti-racism/multiculturalism, feminism, environmentalism, and gay rights, which are the six ideological pillars of political correctness, or giving them a crash course on postmodernism. It can seem like Chapter 4 of this book that covers political correctness and Chapter 5 that covers postmodernism could serve as essential background reading to illuminate the meaning of nearly every text on the list set for study.

For decades there has been a trend in text selection where texts were added to the list that reflect the responses of the politically correct to current or perennial issues of concern to them that are being debated in Australian society. For example, after the Howard Coalition Government in 1997 rejected most of the findings of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission's report on the 'stolen generations', *Bringing Them Home*, there was a massive upsurge in left-wing political activism in Aboriginal issues that has continued unabated for decades since. So, it is not surprising that there have been many additions to the text list that promoted the left-wing Aboriginal political agenda. Recently, this is evident in the additions of Kate Grenville's *The Lieutenant*, Robyn Davidson's *Tracks*, and Tom Wright's *Black Diggers*.

The Coalition Government's policy to deter illegal immigration by using offshore detention centres, and other resolute measures, has generated intense outrage among the politically correct. So, it is not

surprising to have seen many texts added to the list that made a case for accepting illegal immigrants or that made a case for establishing the credibility of illegal immigrants as legitimate refugees or that presented refugees as ideal settlers, or that implicitly argued for accepting more refugees, especially refugees from the Middle East and especially Muslims. This is evident with the inclusion of Joan London's *The Golden Age*, Euripides' *Medea* (after Medea murdered the princess and the king, and then murdered her children to punish her husband Jason she became a refugee), Peter Skrzynecki's *Old/New World*, Kent MacCarter and Ali Lemer (eds), *Joyful Strains: Making Australia Home*, Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis*, and Malala Yousafzai and Christina Lamb's *I am Malala*.

The long-standing concern of the politically correct Left regarding fluctuating popular support for large-scale multi-racial and multi-ethnic immigration and multiculturalism can be seen in the choice of texts promoting the value of immigration or multiculturalism, like Joan London's *The Golden Age*, Christine Piper's *After Darkness*, Alistair MacLeod's *Island*, Peter Skrzynecki's *Old/New World*, Kent MacCarter and Ali Lemer (eds) *Joyful Strains: Making Australia Home*, and Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*.

The obsession of the politically correct Left with racism and their desire to characterise Australia as a racist society is evident in the choices of Kate Grenville's *The Lieutenant*, Christine Piper's *After Darkness*, Robyn Davidson's *Tracks*, Kent MacCarter and Ali Lemer (eds) *Joyful Strains: Making Australia Home*, and Tom Wright's *Black Diggers*. Meanwhile, their fascination with depicting the United States as a racist society is evident in the choice of Fred D'Aguiar's *The Longest Memory*, while their parallel fascination with racism in South Africa is expressed in the choice of the film directed by Clint Eastwood *Invictus*.

Left-wing opposition to Australia's participation in the US-led coalition that is waging the War on Terror, and the desire of the

politically correct to counter what they regard as ‘Islamophobia’ with what they regard as ideologically suitable positive representations of Muslims, can be found in Marjane Satrapi’s *Persepolis*, Katherine Boo’s *Behind the Beautiful Forevers*, Kent MacCarter and Ali Lemer (eds) *Joyful Strains: Making Australia Home*, Geraldine Brooks’ *Year of Wonders*, and Malala Yousafzai and Christina Lamb’s *I am Malala*. Meanwhile, a less specific and more generalisable pacifist argument can be found in David Malouf’s *Ransom*.

The rise of postmodernism and post-colonialism has been increasingly significant in Australian politics and also constituted a significant trend in Australian education. Postmodern and post-colonial texts are well represented on the list with texts by authors whose ethnicity represents a challenge to Eurocentrism, such as Aravind Adiga’s *The White Tiger* and Christine Piper’s *After Darkness*. There are also texts that present postmodern or post-colonial revisionist accounts of history such as Kate Grenville’s *The Lieutenant*, Hannah Kent’s *Burial Rites*, Tom Wright’s *Black Diggers*, and Fred D’Aguiar’s *The Longest Memory*, while Kent MacCarter and Ali Lemer (eds) *Joyful Strains: Making Australia Home* includes contributions by authors that promote postmodernism. The film directed by Sarah Polley, *Stories We Tell*, raises postmodern issues about storytelling and truth without appearing to challenge Western civilisation. However, David Malouf’s *Ransom* and especially Margaret Atwood’s *The Penelopiad* present a postmodern challenge to the canon of great Western literature by offering postmodern politically correct, left-wing rewrites that serve to counter or undermine or replace the classic texts by Homer, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, which sit at the origins of the Western literary tradition.

The promotion of environmentalism can be found in Cate Kennedy’s *Like a House on Fire* and in Hannie Rayson’s *Extinction*, while the classic text, Mary Shelly’s *Frankenstein*, can be interpreted as having significant themes compatible with environmentalism. Meanwhile,

the promotion of environmentalism in combination with hostility to Western civilisation can be found in Robyn Davidson's *Tracks*, and the film written and directed by Sean Penn *Into the Wild*.

The politically correct Left love to glorify the 1960s, celebrating it as the halcyon days of left-wing political activism. It was, of course, the time when the movement that came to be known as political correctness originated. The 1960s set the mould for the kind of political activists and activism they admire, and led to the tendency of the politically correct to promote the concept of the left-wing political activist as the ideal citizen. Correspondingly, there is a pattern on the list of choosing texts that glorify left-wing political activists of the kind that emerged in the 1960s. In addition, many of the texts go further than this and provide characters who are left-wing political activists who promote politically correct causes that serve as role models that the readers are positioned to admire or emulate. This is evident in Kate Grenville's *The Lieutenant*, Hannie Rayson's *Extinction*, Geraldine Brooks' *Year of Wonders*, Fred D'Aguiar's *The Longest Memory*, Malala Yousafzai and Christina Lamb's *I am Malala*, and the film directed by Nigel Cole *Made in Dagenham*. These texts dovetail perfectly with the efforts of the most radical left-wing teachers to mobilise young people to attend student strikes to urge governments to do more to combat what they believe is man-made climate change.

This glorification of the 1960s includes the promotion of the values of the hippy counter-culture (which in some texts includes positive representations of the hippy drug culture). These celebrations of the hippy counter-culture can be found in Amy Witting's *I for Isobel*, Robyn Davidson, *Tracks*, Geraldine Brooks' *Year of Wonders*, and the film written and directed by Sean Penn *Into the Wild*.

Marxist/socialist views and sentiments are noticeably very well represented on the list. Marxist/socialist views can be found in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*, Kate Grenville's *The Lieutenant*, Hannah Kent's *Burial Rites*, Ursula Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness*, Amy Witting's

I for Isobel, Cate Kennedy's *Like a House on Fire*, Hannie Rayson's *Extinction*, Marjane Satrapi's, *Persepolis*, Katherine Boo's *Behind the Beautiful Forevers*, the film written and directed by Sean Penn *Into the Wild*, David Malouf's *Ransom*, Kent MacCarter and Ali Lemer (eds), *Joyful Strains: Making Australia Home*, Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*, Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*, Geraldine Brooks' *Year of Wonders*, Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad*, Tom Wright's *Black Diggers*, Fred D'Aguiar's *The Longest Memory*, and the film directed by Nigel Cole *Made in Dagenham*. Fortunately, there are two texts on the list that may not directly criticise Marxism but they do directly criticise totalitarian communism from a left-wing perspective: Anna Funder's *Stasiland* and George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. However, despite the presence of these two texts, the majority of texts on the list can make it seem that class warfare is alive and well in Australian classrooms.

Above all, there is a preponderance of feminist texts on the list. There are probably two reasons for this. Firstly, there was a rise of feminist political activism in the second decade of the twenty-first century that led to the emergence of the #MeToo movement in 2017, which then served to accelerate the rise of feminism even more dramatically after that, with this trend eventually captivating the imaginations of many on the Left. This political trend is reflected in the abundance of feminist texts on the list: Kate Grenville's *The Lieutenant*, Hannah Kent's *Burial Rites*, Ursula Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness*, Amy Witting's *I for Isobel*, Cate Kennedy's *Like a House on Fire*, Euripides' *Medea* (a classic text that received a postmodern feminist reinterpretation), Hannie Rayson's *Extinction*, the film directed by Sarah Polley *Stories We Tell*, Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis*, Katherine Boo's *Behind the Beautiful Forevers*, Robyn Davidson's *Tracks*, Geraldine Brooks' *Year of Wonders*, Joanna Murray-Smith's *Bombshells*, Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad*, Fred D'Aguiar's *The Longest Memory*, Malala Yousafzai and Christina Lamb's *I am Malala*, and the film directed by Nigel Cole *Made in Dagenham*. Secondly, the extraordinarily high

number of feminist writers on the list, and the choice of Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad*, which seeks to strike a blow against patriarchy by rewriting a classic text (the *Odyssey*) that is despised by many feminists because it is seen as contributing to patriarchy, suggests that the text selection panel and the authorities in the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority may have taken up the feminist cause and are using the text list to promote the feminist political agenda. Rather than choosing texts for their cultural, aesthetic and historical significance they appear to be choosing an abundance of feminist texts so that the text list can be seen to collectively strike a blow against patriarchy. If this is what is happening, I wonder how many parents, who are, of course, the people paying for this education system through their taxes, would have given their permission to the education authorities to do this if they had been asked. If the education authorities are playing politics with the text list, they are doing so at the expense of providing the kind of quality education they should be providing.

Of the thirty-six texts on the list, those that offer an alternative point of view to what is compatible with political correctness come from only a few texts in the minority category of 'established works' or classics. That means that in the majority categories of 'new' texts or new 'Australian' texts there is an absence of texts that favourably present conservative or liberal or other non-Left views or that challenge political correctness. That suggests that the text selection advisory panel and the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority either could not find any of these texts (which is hard to believe) or that they did not want to. By working in an institution that appears to be encased in an ideological bubble of political correctness, where the politically correct are surrounded by the like-minded, it probably never occurred to them to consider including other points of view than those that appeal to themselves. This bias in text selection is a consequence of the narrow ideological disposition of an education system that does not remotely reflect the

ideological diversity found in the Australian community. As well as the obvious educational shortfalls arising from this blatant ideological bias, it also raises important issues regarding democracy and political pluralism in this country.

In regards to democracy, the virtual ideological conformity of the text list, which exemplifies the ideological conformity in the education system, carries the implication that what is important in society is what the politically correct Left considers to be important. It also carries the implication that the issues that should be considered socially and politically are the issues that concern the politically correct. And when these issues are considered, the appropriate way to consider them is the way that the politically correct would consider them. This conformity can constrain political debate and inhibit free thought, free speech and the free flow of ideas. These liberties are elements of the kind of political culture that is needed to contribute to an effectively functioning democracy. Democracy can function with conformist constraints, but less well, with bad policy being a more likely result along with an inability to reform the bad policies that are anointed as politically correct, so the public ends up being stuck with them.

This ideological monopoly in the education system is also inconsistent with the effective functioning of political pluralism, which involves the spread of power rather than its concentration, and the freedom for political groups to form and compete in the political arena. In the education system, one of the competing groups in society, the politically correct Left, dominates the dissemination of ideas to the virtual exclusion of the other groups. Along with their domination of the ABC and much of the media, this domination of the education system gives the politically correct profound advantages over the other groups that together constitute the majority. In the education system, rather than experience the political ebb and flow of pluralistic competition, the politically correct minority can comfortably expect to have their views consistently validated and transmitted. Meanwhile,

the conservatives and liberals and others who are not of the Left can expect that the education system will consistently challenge, undermine, marginalise or ignore their views or even vilify them. And broad-minded, democratically-minded people on the Left who would like to have their children educated in a way that introduces them to the range of views compatible with a pluralistic political system, well, they are not served by this deep-seated and pervasive ideological bias either. Like everyone else, their children are suffering the nutrient deficiency of being repeatedly served only one dish on the menu.

The cultural implications of this politically correct, left-wing ideological bias are serious too. The domination of the text list by the politically correct Left carries the unstated but clearly evident implication that to be intelligent and creative, and to produce literature that might one day be worthy of study in schools, is to be politically correct and left-wing. The world of literature therefore reveals itself to be an exclusive club reserved solely for the believers in one ideology only. The rest of you can forget it. The implied message for creative and talented conservatives and liberals is that you will never belong here and never be accepted. Conform, or find something else to do with your life.

And it's the same politically correct pattern of text selection at other year levels

There are no official lists of texts set for years 7, 8, 9 10, or 11, so the English faculties at each school compose their own lists and make their own selections, usually taking their cue from the official year 12 list and its selection criteria. Ideologically, the result is virtually the same in each school for these lower year levels as it is for the year 12 level that is determined by an official text list. It is the domination by texts that promote or are compatible with the politically correct, left-wing world view. As I said earlier, this bias is the consequence of the reality that virtually everyone involved in setting the curriculum shares the same politically correct, left-wing values and beliefs. It is

the consequence of the virtual absence in the education system of the ideological diversity evident in the Australian community. So it makes no ideological difference whether the texts are selected by elites in the education system or by the English faculties at each school.

From what I have been able to observe as a private tutor, who tutors students from a broad cross-section of schools and at many year levels, is that there is a very noticeable consistency between schools but also some variation. For example, the minority of high school English faculties that see themselves as more academically oriented may insist on plays by Shakespeare being studied successively from middle to senior year levels. This is encouraging but it is far from being the norm. What you are more likely to find are English faculties that may insist on texts that promote feminism or multiculturalism or migrant and refugee issues. It should also be mentioned that in text selection there is no noticeable ideological distinction to be seen between regular state schools or selective-entry state schools or independent schools or Catholic and other religious schools. Political correctness in the education system is universal. This is because almost all the teachers are politically correct and left-wing, and they choose the texts that they value or that appeal to them. The overarching result is that politically correct, left-wing texts will consistently dominate the students' exposure to English literature throughout their entire high school.

At this stage you might be thinking that this ideological dominance of the text lists by the politically correct Left could not get any worse. Well it can, and it did.

Too male or too white: postmodern text selection by politically correct quotas

It seems it was not enough for the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, and its text selection advisory panel, for almost all of the texts on the prescribed list for year 12 English to be by left-

wing authors, or to reflect left-wing perspectives, or to promote left-wing values, or to make left-wing arguments in favour of left-wing positions on issues drawn from left-wing agendas; they decided it was time for text selection to be by politically correct quotas. In regards to the domination of the curriculum by the politically correct Left, we have reached the next stage in the political-correctness revolution. The culprit behind this development is the steady rise in popularity of postmodern theoretical perspectives in the education bureaucracy. And it seems that no one was there behind the scenes to shout: Have you forgotten something? We are supposed to be teaching English!

With the rise of postmodernism, this deep-seated left-wing bias in the education system has taken a turn for the worse. To be selected for the text list, it is now no longer good enough to be left-wing; if an author is male or white he may not make the cut. Yes, they are choosing texts for study, or rejecting them, according to the gender or colour of the author or the gender or colour of the main protagonists in the story. Yes, it has come to that.

In 2018, year 12 students could be asked to critically compare Anna Funder's *Stasiland* to George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. In 2019, year 12 students could be asked to compare Anna Funder's *Stasiland* to Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*. Anna Funder's text stayed on. She's female. But George Orwell was dropped. He's male and white. Kazuo Ishiguro was added. He is of Japanese ancestry but raised in Britain. (He can therefore be classified as 'Asian'.) Comparing Anna Funder's examination of life in totalitarian communist East Germany to George Orwell's philosophical critique of Stalinist totalitarianism (presented in the form of a novel) made great sense. It was a worthy educational exercise. Comparing Funder's work of literary journalism and social history to Ishiguro's fanciful fictional text about the mistreatment of a hypothetical subclass of clones created to provide body parts for transplant surgeries is absurd and of little or no educational value. But there were quotas to fill. It would have

been more sensible and educational to have replaced Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* with his allegorical novel *Animal Farm*, which also presents a critique of Stalinism. It would have been a far better choice since the replacement would have to be paired with *Stasiland* for comparison. But that did not happen. Consequently, the number of 'established works' or classics on the list fell from a precarious eight out of thirty-six texts to an even more precarious seven out of thirty-six. As I said, there were quotas to fill and 'dead white males' had to be sacrificed.

In the March 2019 issue of the *VCAA Bulletin*, the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority proudly announced: 'As we approach International Women's Day on Friday 8 March, for the first time the number of works written by women on the VCE English and English as an Additional Language (EAL) and VCE Literature text lists exceeds the number of works written by men'. This boast was expressed in a journal that they regard as being read by the like-minded rather than the general public. Arguably, this is a statement more suited to a political activist than to an educator. Although this admission was made to their own in-crowd, at least they have finally come clean. There was a political agenda behind their text selections after all. They were using the text list to wage their own war against patriarchy. And notice the casual reference to International Women's Day, taking it for granted that we should all accept that this or any other politicised day should have anything to do with the content of the English course. With these education elites only able to rotate on or off the list about twenty-five per cent of the texts each year, it is clear that they have been pursuing this agenda for a while and the text list for 2018 was already stacked to a stage just short of when they could make their triumphant political announcement. There were still a few of those pesky male authors to kick off the list. But with that finally achieved, it was time to celebrate. And let's not forget that some of those pesky white authors had to go as well.

How did it get to this? First, the rise and rise of the politically

correct Left has, since the 1960s, gone through successive stages, with it becoming more audacious in its demands as its successes mounted and as its control of key socialising institutions consolidated. In addition, it has simultaneously been informed and transformed by the rise of postmodernism, which helped to radicalise its demands. It is largely due to the influence of postmodernism that the politically correct Left has, on many fronts, become obsessed with pursuing its reform agendas by applying quotas (determined on the basis of race, ethnicity, class, gender and sexual preference) and the politically correct, politicised academics and bureaucrats in the education system are part of this trend.

A longstanding push by the politically correct Left towards reforming high school curricula to give emphasis to Asia, environmentalism and Aborigines was consolidated in December 2008 by the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians*, an official statement made by education bureaucrats on behalf of federal, state and territory education ministers. The document made declarations about the curriculum such as the following: ‘In addition, a focus on environmental sustainability will be integrated across the curriculum and all students will have the opportunity to access Indigenous content where relevant’. In 2008, the federal government and all of the state and territory governments were Labor governments (although a Liberal government was elected in Western Australia in September) and the education bureaucracies were thoroughly dominated by the politically correct Left, as they had been for decades.

The document is interesting in what it said and what it did not say. There was no mention of the need for students to also develop an appreciation of Western civilisation. The term ‘diversity’ was used, as is typical of these types of policy documents, but this was to be understood in terms of race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexual preference, and disability etc., along with a sense of ‘global citizenship’. There was

no mention of including a diversity of thought and opinion. While Asia, the environment and Aborigines are very important and worthy of study, there was no mention of including any diversity of opinion in these areas so the door was opened for the further politicisation and ideological colouring of the curricula. There would be no room for politically incorrect opinions, such as erudite academic challenges to the ‘stolen generations’ thesis or to the man-made global warming thesis. And federal, state and territory education departments and schools could always use this document to justify promoting the politically correct Left’s favourite causes, such as the acceptance of more people who claim to be refugees who arrive illegally by boat. Along with additional political correctness, postmodernism had the green light and, potentially, so did text selection by quotas, since it was possible to look at the English text list of 2008 as falling short of this ‘diversity’ especially in regards to this Asia focus, Aboriginal focus and the inclusion of environmental issues. To the politically correct bureaucrats and academics with authority in this area, there was a job to be done, and political causes to be promoted. As the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority triumphantly declared in the *VCAA Bulletin* in March 2019: ‘Things have changed since 2008, when only eight female authors were included on the VCE English text list, compared with 28 male authors’. In 2019, is it mission accomplished? Or is this just the beginning of worse to come?

Let’s examine another crucial document in regards to this shift towards text selection by quotas. It is a survey of VCE English text lists over a ten year period from 2010 to 2019: *A Report on Trends in Senior English Text-Lists* (2019). It articulates the thinking behind the push to have more female authors than male authors on the English text list. It is a document that provides insights into the thinking behind the next phase in the political correctness revolution. It is a document dripping with postmodernism.

The well-known and often repeated expressions ‘education has

lost its way' or 'political correctness gone too far' seem pathetically inadequate to describe the anti-educational thinking behind this document. It is evidence of the elites in the education system waging war on their own culture (while unsuspecting taxpayers are paying for it).

With the research having been funded by the Victorian Association for the Teaching of English (VATE) and the University of Melbourne, the document stated in its Preface that it is 'advocating for greater diversity' in text section. And, as we well know, 'diversity' means diversity in terms of race, ethnicity, class, gender and sexual preference rather than the diversity of ideas. And this inevitably means rejecting white males because that is the only way that this 'diversity' can be achieved. And because so many authors in the history of literature are white males, this means rejecting a great deal of our literary heritage (including some of the finest contributions) on the basis of race and gender. Again, in this document, that old trick of using the racial and ethnic diversity of the population is drawn on as a rationalisation by the politically correct Left to bring in the kinds of reforms they always wanted to bring in anyway. If they consulted these racially and ethnically diverse families they might discover that they have different opinions on the manner in which they would like to see their children educated. This document is part of a postmodern movement within the education system intended to influence the text choices of the text selection advisory panel and the English faculties in high schools. It is a movement that already has momentum.

The survey highlighted the preponderance of novels and other traditional forms of literature on the curriculum. Taking its cue from postmodernism and its tendency to consider all text types 'to be equally worthy' regardless of whether they are of high culture or popular culture, the document advocated for the inclusion of 'video games' as texts to be studied in English classrooms. And from a background of postmodernism and constructivist educational theory

the document argued that these video games are relevant to young people's lives. (I hope these video games were designed by women, otherwise: Oops! There goes our gender balance.) Of course, the inclusion of video games as texts would mean that other texts would have to be pushed off the list. This advocacy reveals a postmodern mindset evident among education elites, a mindset that has moved dramatically away from prioritising educating young people about the history of literature and its major works. If instituted, this change would provide yet another reason why you can graduate from high school in Australia and not know nearly as much as you could or should. As a private tutor, too often I find myself in discussions with concerned parents about their son's computer game addiction. When I first meet these parents, they plead with me to do what I can to guide and inspire their son to read quality literature. Many of these parents are Asian. I'm sure that these parents, and others, will be very impressed if the study of 'video games' is added to the English curriculum.

The survey also found that most of the texts were set in Britain, North America, Australia and New Zealand. To me, this is not surprising since the subject is English and these are mostly English-speaking regions that have produced English literature. But to the postmodern, post-colonial, politically correct mindset, this constitutes a problem. Those are places where white people are found. Apparently, there were not enough texts set in Asia, Africa and South America. They even provided a bar-chart to show it. To the postmodern, post-colonial, politically correct mindset, this graph reveals something that has to be addressed. Their solution can only mean one thing: discrimination. Text selection is therefore not to be about choosing historically significant, quality literature regardless of race or ethnicity; it's about choosing texts on the basis of race and ethnicity. As the document argued, the 'majority of Australians born abroad are from Asia, and not Europe'. Again, Asians (who

are never consulted on these matters) are used by the postmodern, post-colonial, politically correct elites to rationalise bringing about the changes that these postmodern, post-colonial, politically correct elites want for education in Australia.

In regards to considering the gender of authors, the document made its feminist political objectives clear: ‘... a deep engagement with literature and the arts in a classroom environment can have positive effects on gender bias and carries with it the potential to alter sexist views of authors and creators’. This is social engineering, not education. Education is about providing knowledge and developing skills, but the focus here is on changing the views that the politically correct do not like and that they label pejoratively as ‘gender bias’ or ‘sexist’. The document also lamented that there were no ‘transgender’ authors on the lists. This part of the document also expressed the displeasure that it is mostly ‘male authors and creators who form the “canon” of Western literature and the arts’. Hence, according to the principles articulated in this document, male authors, like George Orwell, had to go. And if this document is as influential as its insider authors hope it to be, you can expect that other male authors from the canon will follow him. A graph in the document showed that that by 2019 the number of female authors outnumbered the number of male authors. So, this problem had been, in their opinion, fixed. But to stay fixed, selection decisions on the basis of the gender of the authors will have to continue.

The document also complained that too many of the main characters in the texts are male, and it included a graph to show this. But they were pleased to point out that by 2019 this imbalance had also been fixed. There was now an equality of male and female main characters among the thirty-six texts on the list. What a relief! I’m sure you are all delighted to hear that. However, from that announcement, the document went on to complain at length that there was an ‘over-representation of heterosexual characters’. And

this proves the point about postmodernists that I made in Chapter 5. No matter what you do to please them, they are never satisfied. The more you do to appease them, the more they find to complain about. They are condemned with the affliction of permanent outrage. They are people to be pitied rather than followed. If you follow them, you end up wrecking everything.

This tendency to never be satisfied is also evident in the way the document complained about the content of the texts set in Australia, even though the Australian texts have been almost universally politically correct and left wing since long before the period covered in this survey. Amusingly, they even summarised the variety of ‘themes’ of the texts set in Australia in postmodern, politically correct terms as: ‘Race’, ‘Religion’ (which is a subset of ethnicity), ‘Class’ and ‘Gender’. But this was not good enough. Apparently, the texts were too male, too white and there were not nearly enough texts created by ‘Indigenous’ authors or featuring Indigenous themes and issues. As I commented above, the postmodernists are never satisfied.

As the document did with the texts set in Australia, it summarised the themes of all the texts under the postmodern, politically correct categories of race, ethnicity, class and gender, or, as they put it: ‘Race’, ‘Indigenous’ (which is a subset of race), ‘Religion’ (which is a subset of ethnicity), ‘Class’ and ‘Gender’. Ironically, this categorisation could be seen as an inadvertent admission that the themes of the texts are overwhelmingly politically correct and left-wing. In addition, these categories can also be interpreted as reflecting the theoretical obsession of the postmodernists with these social divisions.

The conclusion of the document was predictable. Although the document claimed that there were some ‘positive trends’, such as achieving gender ‘equality’ in terms of male and female authorship and in the balance of genders among the main characters, it sternly noted that ‘the privileging of texts from the British Isles, was alarming’. Again, comments like this make you wonder whether

these postmodern educators have completely forgotten that they are supposed to be teaching English.

Let's apply their postmodern, politically correct thinking to other subjects to see how absurd this thinking has become. Suppose you were to study one of the most widely spoken languages in the world, Mandarin Chinese, and there was a literature component to the subject. Despite this being a major international language (as English is), you would comfortably expect to be mostly studying Chinese authors who set their stories in China. You would not demand that Chinese education authorities balance the genders and races of the authors or the global settings of the texts to include more white people. Instead, you would expect them to deliver the best course in Mandarin Chinese that they could provide. I am interested in the subject of psychology. Many of the best authors have turned out to be Jewish people. Should I read the texts that I believe will be the most informative or subject my choices to quotas, to try to balance my text choices with more Muslim authors? Would this be a fruitful way to approach the subject? Would I be better educated in psychology as a result? My interests in psychology and literature led me to research the genre of romantic fiction. It is by far one of the most successful genres in publishing, constituting about a third of all fiction sold, possibly more. Almost all the authors of romantic fiction are women who write for women. If you read about the art of writing romantic fiction, as I have done, you inevitably find yourself reading from the experts – who are women. Should my reading have followed quotas so that half of the authors I consulted were male? I am also interested in military history and theory. Consequently, I have read Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*. I did not choose this text because the author is Asian. I chose the text because the author is a philosophical genius and I would be enriched by reading him. Great literature is there for us all to appreciate, regardless of the race or gender of the authors.

As we enter the era of postmodern, politically correct text selection by quotas, it may soon be less likely that high schools will be introducing young people to great literature like Homer's *Iliad* or George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Instead, the ultimate text set for study would be one that was written by a transsexual, Aboriginal lesbian whose multimodal text was set in China but featured indigenous themes and had a gender balance between the male and female lead characters, some of whom were gay.

The English course could be so much better if only Shakespeare was black

The postmodern, post-colonial movement in the education system against the canon of great Western literature and for politically correct diversity quotas was on full display at the National Conference of the Australian Association for the Teaching of English (AATE) in November–December 2019 titled *My story flows in more than one direction: power of story, politics of voice*.

Speakers and seminar presenters used postmodern and post-colonial jargon and derided the literary contributions of 'dead white males' while advocating fervently for even more multi-racial, multi-ethnic and indigenous voices than are already present in the curriculum texts lists, which inevitably means squeezing out even more of the few texts from the canon that remain, including Shakespeare. The hostility to the canon was palpable. And so was the venomous response of many speakers and presenters towards the conservative or liberal critics who have criticised the education establishment for what they are trying to do in education, especially those commentators who have tried to defend the canon.

The convenors of the conference, which included one of the co-authors of *A Report on Trends in Senior English Text-Lists*, discussed above, in the preamble to the conference programme raged against a curriculum that is not nearly as radical as they would desire:

Our overtested, regimented, results-based education system more and more resembles Mr. Gradgrind's soul-destroying worship of 'Facts, facts, facts'; with powerful voices in the community baying for the teaching of (their own) dubious ethics, and urging a return to 'basics', a country none of us has ever visited. It is impossible for English teaching not to be political.

Ironically, the convenors of this conference, to express their rage against those who advocate a return to the canon, quoted from an author from the canon, the nineteenth century novelist Charles Dickens, to introduce a conference intended to advocate against the inclusion of texts by 'dead white males' and for the inclusion of even more texts by female or racially diverse contemporary authors. The character 'Gradgrind' is from the novel by Charles Dickens *Hard Times* (1854). In it, Dickens presents a case for the progressive education of his day and he used the narrow-minded, fact-obsessed character Gradgrind to represent what Dickens thought was wrong with the education system. However, to understand this literary allusion the readers will have to possess knowledge of the kind of classic literature that these educators seem determined to deny to current and future generations of students. The novel *Hard Times* was last on the text list in 2010, and although another text by Dickens (*A Christmas Carol*) had been included as recently as 2014, with the current rise of postmodernism and post-colonialism, he may struggle forlornly to make it back on the list. These convenors appear to want to deny current and future generations of young people the cultural literacy that these convenors seem to display so proudly. Obviously, in their efforts to score points off their opponents, they had not thought of that embarrassing contradiction.

They were not alone in this. One of the main speakers, who was an author whom the convenors had invited to argue against the canon and for the inclusion of more texts by diverse authors, after

performing in the way the convenors would have wished, responded to a question from the audience by appearing to drop her guard and speak gratefully of having been taught six Shakespearean plays while at high school. But the speaker quickly corrected herself by following this remark with an appropriately post-colonial criticism of the underrepresentation of diverse voices in her texts at high school, an opinion that was more ideologically appropriate for this event.

Interestingly, at this speaker's session, a fiery teacher in the audience asked a question of the speaker, which was really a post-colonial political speech disguised as a question, about what we are going to do about the 'imperialism' of the curriculum. His comments were followed by spontaneous applause from the auditorium of teachers present. But I did not applaud. And as I looked around I noticed that there were others who did not applaud either. I thought, please, please, let there be teachers present who think like I do on this issue and are sitting in silent disagreement. I hoped that was the case. I still do. But I am increasingly doubtful. It was also the case that the derisive and dismissive references made by numerous speakers to texts by 'dead white males', including hostile references to Shakespeare, passed without a murmur of discontent from the audience.

On the last day of the conference, I had decided to attend a seminar on William Shakespeare's *Othello*. This famous play had been on the year 12 English text list in 2003 and it was on the year 12 text list for the subject of Literature in 2019. It is also taught at junior high school levels in some schools. It is my favourite Shakespearean play and I would number it in the top ten of my favourite works of literature. Its principal themes taught me valuable lessons on the dangers of jealousy and how emotions can cloud one's judgment. I can therefore say that this text enriched my life. I have enjoyed teaching it to students and they have enjoyed learning it. *Othello* is a tragic hero, a good man brought down by his fatal flaw of jealousy. I

learned from his downfall. I remain grateful to Shakespeare for what his play taught me and my students.

The teacher-presenter (aged about thirty) opened his seminar with a wry smile and the projection of a slide depicting a neo-Nazi skinhead leaning comfortably against a bronze statue of Shakespeare. As he explained, the purpose of the image was to link the two, to link Shakespeare and racism. Drawing on the post-colonialism and postmodern semiotics he would have learned at university, he described the comfortable stance of the neo-Nazi skinhead as expressing ownership. He presented other slides to depict Shakespeare as an agent of white colonialism imposed on resentful black people. He showed slides and videos that celebrated black resistance to the imposition of Shakespeare as a dominant discourse of white oppression. As he played one of these scornful video clips, one of the teachers in the room exclaimed: 'This is great!' She told us that she had used some of this material in her classroom. Most of the teachers here were Literature teachers; an English subject where postmodernism has had a much stronger impact than it has on mainstream English teachers. However, the influence of postmodernism is spreading among all English teachers and this conference was intended to contribute to that.

The teacher-presenter talked about the 'troubled place of Shakespeare' in the curriculum and how that 'causes problems'. In his post-colonial denunciation of Shakespeare he complained that 'tradition' in education had 'stymied' teachers, and by that he meant having to teach texts from the canon. At this point, I could not help feeling sorry for this teacher's students and the way he would be attempting to prejudice them against the appreciation of some of the greatest literature ever produced. I wondered how I would have felt if I was a young person who had been introduced to Shakespeare in this caustic manner. Would it have alienated me from appreciating great literature?

His lesson to teachers on how to teach Shakespeare to their students was not about appreciating Shakespeare; it was about hating him and ultimately removing him from the curriculum. As many of the politically correct predictably do, he used the fact that his classroom is racially and ethnically diverse to justify his treatment of Shakespeare and his questioning of his suitability in modern classrooms. When he said this, there was not a murmur of discontent from among the teachers present, not a murmur. A Shakespearean text was on the text list, included according to the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority guidelines that insist on the presence of a 'Shakespearean text' on the list, but this text was being treated with post-colonial contempt.

Rather than teaching Shakespeare, he was teaching a hatred of British culture and Western civilisation. Post-colonialism was the villain here, not Shakespeare, and not the teacher either. This teacher was a victim of his times and of the toxic trends in education that he was helping to spread. Although he spoke with the glee of an adolescent vandal who felt that surge of power just after he had thrown a rock through the stained-glass window of the local church and gotten away with it, I sensed that, fundamentally, he was not a bad man. Unfortunately he had been filled with hatred for his culture by a toxic post-colonial ideology that he confused with intellectual sophistication. He was not a leader either, but rather a non-commissioned officer showing his initiative by applying the scorched-earth policy of post-colonialism in his classroom and by instructing other teachers to do the same. He had taken his cue from those who are higher up. And, to me, that is what made his attitudes more disturbing. He displayed the confidence of someone whose actions have been legitimised by those in authority. As a product of the politically correct era, he was not alone in this regard. When he broke us up into discussion groups, I whispered my concerns to the teacher next to me. To my dismay, she defended the sentiments

of the presenter. She added that she was from Queensland and, as a consequence, she had a greater need to promote anti-racism in her classroom. By attending this seminar, and this conference, I had stumbled onto something big. I was witnessing the emergence of something of historical significance that was yet to be widely recognised. It was a horrible trend in education that already had momentum. And I knew where it was headed.

Postmodernism and political correctness have given birth to, and unleashed, an anti-intellectual movement that has taken root in a profession of people who are supposed to number among our cultural custodians. Too many education bureaucrats and teachers have become swept up in a mania of politically correct virtue signalling that expresses contempt for some of the finest examples of our shared cultural heritage. This movement has wrought much havoc already. The quality of education in this country has suffered enormously but the prevailing trend suggests strongly that the situation will become far worse with the emergence of text selection by politically correct quotas.

The use of text lists to promote the causes and agendas of the politically correct Left represents a dereliction of duty as educators and an abuse of bureaucratic power. Ironically, in an education system that professes to promote 'diversity' one of the principal failings of this education system is its lack of diversity, and by that I mean a lack of the diversity of ideas. This has resulted in the institutionalisation of political intolerance. And, as we have already recognised, one of the most militant dimensions of this intolerance is a determined anti-intellectual push that is hostile towards what remains of the canon of great Western literature. Even Shakespeare is vulnerable.