

Deconstructing Crowley's 'Western Australia': a poststructural analysis of 'new gentryism'

I

Francis Keble Crowley began his work as a lecturer in history at the University of Western Australia in 1952 after completing a Ph.D at Melbourne University. Over the next twelve years he exercised a persistent influence over the shape of Western Australian history until his departure for Adelaide University in 1964. It is the aim of this essay to deconstruct Crowley's works during this period, and reveal them as a form of gentryism which constituted 'Western Australia' as a historical and social ideal within a Eurocentric 'colonial discourse'.

There is no pre-given, historically 'true' 'Western Australian' 'history' that can be ferreted out from beneath the ideological overlaying of raced, classed and gendered versions of history; no essential or natural defining feature of 'Western Australia' that can explain its history in gentryist terms. By assuming that Western Australians have inherent characteristics and objective identities consistently and predictably different from other Australians, and that these generate definably Western Australian needs and interests, gentryist historians imply that regional difference is a natural rather than a social phenomenon.

Poststructuralist colonial discourse invokes, not Western Australia and gentryism as concrete historical objects, but 'Western Australia' and 'gentryism' as defined and constructed within the particular discourses of colonialism. The story is then no longer about the things that have happened to Western Australians and how they have reacted to them, instead it is about how the subjective and collective meanings of Western Australia as a category of identity have been constructed, and what have been the effects of such constructions.

The concept of gentryism has been a convenient but hegemonic signifier that homogenises 'Western Australian history' into questions of regionalism and social élitism. Gentry histories tend to pass over the role and examples of 'non-élite' cultures and sub-cultures not organised according to a 'Westralian' ethos. History as gentryism is a product of colonialism, so that in effect the élit culture of gentryism continues to participate in the colonisation process, and knowledge is restricted within the boundaries of existing Eurocentric paradigms.

The central symbol of gentryism is the Pioneer. The legendary Pioneer was originally an 'early settler' that had arrived before 1850, but was later extended to include all rural settlers, generally men. Aborigines, women and the town dweller have rarely found a place in the pioneer pantheon. During the 1979 sesquicentenary celebrations, Western Australians were exhorted to continue the work of the pioneers, putting service to the community above self, and expressing gratitude to them for showing us the way. Adulation of the Pioneer encourages reverence for the past, celebrates individual rather than collective or state enterprise, and provides a classless, raceless and genderless society in which difference is obliterated by the generous application of the label of Pioneer.¹

For gentryist historians it is 1829, not 1788, that is the symbolic year in which history began. Western Australia was a wilderness being settled by civilised families from the Services and county society who believed that they mixed in the 'first order of society'. Gentlemen fared well, but labour shortages eventually necessitated the introduction of convicts. These were quietly and easily assimilated into the 'respectability and comfort' of married, propertied life. The gold boom of the 1890s, Group Settlement of the 1920s and even post-War immigration in the 1950s produced similar results as each group of settlers was absorbed into 'Western Australia'. Dissent, repression, conflict, poverty, deviance and insecurity are denied any existence, as is the familiar triptych of ethnicity, gender and class.²

II

One outcome from the recent Royal Commission into the business dealings of the Western Australian Government was a brief public debate on the process involved in selecting which official documents are archived and which are destroyed³. Concurrently with this debate the West Australian carried reports of a similar nature involving organisations within the community such as the Aboriginal Legal Service, the WA Municipal Association and the failed Western Women group, as well as the debate concerning the Freedom

¹Stannage, C.T., Western Australia's Heritage: the pioneer myth, UWA Extension, Monograph Series No. 1, Nedlands 1985, pp4-7 (hereafter - *Pioneer myth*); see also Hirst, J.B., 'The Pioneer Legend', Historical Studies (18) 71, October 1978, pp 316-337.

²*Pioneer myth*, *op. cit.*, pp1-3. For an earlier discussion of the Gentry, rather than gentryism, see Bolton, G.C., 'The Idea of a Colonial Gentry', Historical Studies (13) 51, October 1968, pp307-328.

³Quekett, M., 'Inquiry records row rages on', West Australian 27.10.1992, p8; anon. 'Cabinet record was changed to confuse', *ibid* 28.10.1992, p13; Thomas, B., MLA (letter) 'My honesty's a matter of record', *ibid*, 29.10.1992, p10; Lukis, M., ex-State Archivist (letter) 'Archival controls', *ibid*, p48; McGeough, P., 'Secret witness reveals fear of life', *ibid*, 30.10.1992, p1; Van Niekerk, M., (feature) 'Records fuss done to death in old China', *ibid*, p2; McGeough, P., (feature) 'MP's brawl puts a life on the line', *ibid*, pp8-9; Marchant, Prof. L., (feature) 'Posterity must have all the facts to judge', *ibid*; Pandal, P., MLC, (letter) 'Law must apply to all', *ibid*, p49; Brunton, P., Pres., Aust. Society of Archivists (letter) 'Save valuable probe records', *ibid*, p49.

of Information Bill soon to be presented to the Western Australian Parliament⁴. It was in creating his definition of just what *is* Western Australian history that Crowley first turned his attention to the question of archives.

The Records of Western Australia was published in 1953:

The aim of this work has been strictly utilitarian - to provide a starting point for more detailed investigations, and thereby to lighten the labours of research during its early phases.⁵

Crowley believed that "...a full description..." of the public and private records of the state was needed due to the growing interest in historical research in Australia. The student of Australian history needed both bibliographies and guides to locating original records.⁶ The 'full description', however, had some fairly definite boundaries, some imposed by the records themselves, some imposed by Crowley.

The structural boundaries identified by Crowley are the fact that surviving records are a "fortuitous residue" of those originally created, that a number of departmental archives were still uncatalogued and unused and remain in the condition in which they had accumulated, and that the lack of space and staff in the State Archives precluded the transfer of 'bulky' collections of public records to either the State Archives or other repositories where they would be publicly accessible⁷. Only those public records that have survived and been catalogued, and which are publicly accessible, are 'the records of Western Australia'.

The boundaries imposed by Crowley are several. He cites the inability of the compiler to forecast future trends in historical research, the inaccessibility "...even [for] bona fide students..." of certain records, the requirement for records of public administration to conform to an alphabetical arrangement (even if this means grouping together smaller agencies as collective groups of records that do not reflect their nominal or working relationships), and the necessity for all future records to conform to this structure.⁸ Records that are not likely to be useful for future research, that are inaccessible, and that do not conform to archival tidiness are excluded from the definition of 'the records of Western Australia'.

Thus, the records of Western Australia are not an untidy portfolio of past events, but a very carefully circumscribed set of documents. Crowley does make some allowance for records that do not conform to archival neatness:

⁴Molloy, S., 'Records prompt meeting', *West Australian* 27.10.1992; Barrass, T., 'Secrecy stays in FOI Bill: Minister', *ibid*, 28.10.1992, p36; Quekett, M., 'Councils see risk in open records', *ibid*, 31.10.1992; Manly, C., 'Dumped papers revealed bank', *Sunday Times*, 1.11.1992, p5.

⁵Crowley, F.K. The Records of Western Australia, Vol. I, Part 1, Perth 1953, p vii (hereafter - *Records of WA*)

⁶*ibid*, p ii.

⁷*ibid*, pp iv-v.

⁸*ibid*, ppm ii-xi.

...[these] records are described in their *natural structure* in the place where they are stored."⁹(my emphasis)

The implication of this statement and others is that colonial administration (at least) was fairly haphazard, and that it developed organically, with the chaotic 'natural structure' of the records as evidence of this. Fortunately, the professional archivist and the professional historian are able to elevate this chaos to ordered modernity, and so make 'the records' available for public use.

Can Crowley's assumption be allowed to pass unchallenged? The guides produced by the State Archives to the Colonial Secretary's Office correspondence between 1829 and 1883 are but one example that can be used to show that records were carefully arranged and filed, that making copies was a standard practise, and that the system was updated as required by changing political or administrative procedures¹⁰. While gaps in such records series are frustratingly labelled 'missing', the apparent randomness of such gaps could suggest the purposeful destruction of certain records for specific purposes, rather than negligence on the part of public servants. I suspect that Crowley's assumption about the nature of such early record keeping would not stand up to a detailed study.

There is one further length of the boundary being imposed by Crowley that needs consideration. The record must be Western Australian. The definition of such a document requires that it have been written about, or published or written in Western Australia, or by a Western Australian. While "...purely scientific and technical publications..." have been excluded, a large amount of private records relating "...to the general history of Australia and the development of the British Commonwealth of Nations..." are included¹¹. The first part of the definition is a tautology: if Western Australia exists, there must be Western Australians, and because Western Australians do exist, there must be a Western Australia. The object is defined by reference to itself - because it is true it is real, and because it is real it is true. The second part of the definition firmly places Western Australia within the context of Australia and the Empire - it is defined by being an element within a larger and more total object, ostensibly the British Empire, but in effect the whole age of European imperial expansion. What people in the past have understood by the term Western Australia is not at issue. The historian's tidy definition created a certain Western Australia that guided archivists in their selection of documents for preservation and students in their studies of its history - with the result that Western Australia came increasingly to fit the definition.

⁹*ibid*, p xi.

¹⁰State Archives of Western Australia, A Guide to the Colonial Secretary's Office (CSO) Inward and Outward Correspondence 1828-1878 and *ibid* 1878-1883, leaflet, undated but in current use.

¹¹*Records of WA*, *op. cit.*, p xiii.

Because the words Western Australia are written on maps, and books are published about Western Australia, and birth certificates carry the title Western Australia, Western Australia can be established as a concrete fact. It is a real entity within a hierarchy of civilisation. Crowley has defined Western Australia by the careful selection of documents and the naming of them as 'THE records of Western Australia'.

III

The creation of apprentice professional historians in Crowley's classes created the need for comprehensive and accessible source materials, and the need for some concept of Western Australia that would be the object of study. The Records of Western Australia created the Western Australia that Crowley and his students would study for the next decade and beyond. While it is true that the work did provide a 'utilitarian tool', the tool box was of a definite construction of Crowley's. As he said:

The labour of compiling can never bring completeness. There must be physical limits to the extent of the investigation...¹²

The difficulty in forecasting future research trends could only be a problem in trying to ensure that the 'records' will be those required for such research. By implication, those not likely to be so required can be safely disposed of as being non-Western Australian. The naïve expectation that all future 'records' will conform to the structure created by Crowley quite simply denies any knowledge of a history of administrative change and adaptation. The exclusion of science and technology from the 'records' is a statement about the non-Western Australianness of these pursuits. Presumably they lie within the imperial rather than the colonial realm.

Crowley's exclusion of inaccessible documents from the definition of 'the records of Western Australia' seems to imply that there are certain mysterious areas that are neither Western Australian nor fit subjects of historical research. Does he mean adoptions, government property matters, law enforcement or other state actions?¹³ Whether the records of the Royal Commission referred to above are destroyed or restricted, their very inaccessibility would, according to Crowley's definition, make them non-Western Australian. The corruption they document can therefore be excluded from being Western Australian, as can corrupt political and business practises in general. Not being Western Australian, they will not need to be studied by the gentryist historian.

Crowley followed The Records of Western Australia with two articles published in the journal of the Western Australian Historical Society. Each

¹²*ibid*, p ii.

¹³these are three of a number of areas recently listed by the Minister for Justice as not being subject to proposed Freedom of Information legislation because they dealt with personal privacy or commercial confidentiality: 'Secrecy stays in FOI Bill: Minister', West Australian 28.10.1992, p. 36.

addressed the definition of Western Australia established by Crowley, as well as extended the boundaries established by Crowley to the production of Western Australian history.

Master and Servant in Western Australia 1829-1851 appeared in 1953¹⁴. Crowley's discussion of the regulation of labour in the early colony was something quite new in Western Australia. At first glance the emphasis appears to be on the power of the masters through the indenture system, and their attempt to transplant a reciprocal lord-tenant system of social and economic relationships in the 1830s. This was followed by the codification of the indenture system under the control of a magistracy of masters in the 1840s. However, what could be an attack on the masters, and so a rupture in gentryism, is rather a newer and more sophisticated view of the gentryist position.

Crowley disputed the Wakefieldian claim that the slowness of development in the early colony was derived from a shortage of labour. This shortage had supposedly resulted from an exodus from the indenture system by labourers able to take up land. Instead, the majority of servants were released by masters who could no longer afford to pay them, although some servants did remain in service for a long time. Land regulations prevented servants from taking up land until their indentures expired, while the land holdings many acquired were small, ensuring that they remained available for part time or casual work, which suited the master's depleted pocket.

While disputing Wakefieldian claims over a century old may indicate a certain lack of historiographical development in Western Australia, the salient point to notice in Crowley's discussion is the lack of conflict in this period of adaptation in the colony. This is reinforced by Crowley's claim that the inability of Perth landowners to sell or rent land to labourers "...must be taken as a sign that labourers did not always seek independence in landownership..."¹⁵. Having thus established that a class of wage-earning labourers had been created in the colony through a consensus between the colonial gentry and their servants, Crowley was able to absorb the labouring classes of pre-convict Western Australia into the pioneer pantheon. The labourers were not in conflict with the gentry for control of the land, but had instead entered into a new, colonial form of the old reciprocal relationships they had known at home, now mediated through the payment of wages. This consensus came about because:

...the behaviour of the masters and servants depended on their characters, and the influence of a new environment on the age-old traditional relationship between them...¹⁶

¹⁴Crowley, F.K., 'Master and Servant in Western Australia 1829-1851', Early Days: journal and proceedings of the Western Australian Historical Society (IV) V, 1953, pp 94-115.

¹⁵*ibid*, p107.

¹⁶*ibid*, p115.

The consensual character of the Western Australian had been forged from the iron of tradition in the furnace of the colonial environment. Consensus was a central element of the mystique of gentryist Western Australia. Crowley had used the records of Western Australia, as defined by himself, to provide a sound historical basis for the myths of gentryism. These myths had been remembered and recorded in the pages of Early Days since 1926. Now, they were to be modernised and professionalised, and made relevant for the new post war Western Australia of the 1950s.

In 1952, Liberal Premier Ross McLarty invited three academics from the University's History Department:

to enquire into and report -

1. Who was responsible for placing before Sir John Forrest the plan for pumping water to the Goldfields by the method of pumping water which was adopted in the Coolgardie Goldfields water supply scheme?
2. Who was chiefly responsible for persuading Sir John Forrest that the method adopted was practical and that it was within the financial means of the State?¹⁷

The resultant report was published as a book in 1954. Its conclusions were that the Engineer-in-Chief, C Y O'Connor and his departmental officers had placed the plans before Forrest, while the credit for persuading Forrest of the plan's feasibility belonged to no single person¹⁸. The eminence of Forrest assumed in the Premier's invitation is fully supported by the enquirers. At no point is this eminence examined. The terms of the enquiry require his eminence, as do the conclusions reached. The colonial society constructed by the enquirers arrays people by function beneath the Great Man. The most notable of these are the experts and engineers of the Public Works Department. They had devised the scheme and provided the necessary technology upon which Forrest made his political decision to proceed. These results supported those of a number of previous enquiries on the matter that had resulted from claims by Mr N Harper that the pipeline had been his idea, and that he had persuaded Forrest to adopt it¹⁹

While the book is the collective work of three authors, it contains a number of elements found in Crowley's individual works. A somewhat corporatist view of society emerges, with everyone contributing to the common good on the basis of their expertise and training. Within this construct the state becomes a benign institution rather than the invisible entity it had traditionally been in gentry historiography. It ensures the orderly arrangement of the professions in such a way that they can be effectively utilised by political decision makers - the Great Men such as Forrest. All other individuals are homogenised into

¹⁷Alexander, F., Crowley, F.K., and Legge, J.D., The Origins of the Eastern Goldfields Water Scheme in Western Australia: an exercise in the interpretation of historical evidence, Nedlands 1954, p1.

¹⁸*ibid*, p109.

¹⁹*ibid*, 'the Controversy', pp 10-14

groups that are named by occupation. The effect of such blending is to increase the personality of the Great Man, and thus emphasize the role of the leader.

The problem with Mr Harper's claim was that he was not an 'official engineer' in the PWD. To have accepted his claim would have been to accept the amateur's competence as equalling that of the professional, not only in the field of engineering but also history. Harper's refusal to accept the verdicts of historians such as Battye and Murdoch, and bodies such as the Western Australian Historical Society, directly challenged the authority of historians to interpret the past. The authority of the historian is portrayed in the book as being akin to that of the judge, and it was towards establishing this as a 'truth' that Crowley's next project was partly directed.

Problems in Local and Regional History appeared in 1956 in Early Days as a lesson for 'amateur' historians writing their local histories.²⁰

Much of the article addresses the methodology needed for writing local history. All historians, says Crowley, must be familiar with certain techniques acquired through example and training. The boundaries of their subject must be determined, the sources surveyed, the questions that the sources are likely to answer determined, and the questions then answered. Unfortunately, local historians have too often relied upon a 'scissors and paste' approach, with the result that they have been obsessed with detailed chronicles, the earliest days, gentry pedigrees, and the unimportant and insignificant, all based upon either one or a very limited range of sources.

The University of Western Australia had been producing theses and reports covering local and regional histories within Western Australia since 1941, but their standard was not uniform. A permanently high standard could only be maintained through the formal teaching of techniques and close supervision. While historical society journals across Australia had for thirty years "...established a sort of tradition that 'unscholarly and undocumented snippets constitute history'...", the universities had not necessarily upheld a professional standard either²¹.

Crowley's discusses treating Western Australia as a regional history. Such a treatment, he claims, will show the inadequacies of generalisations about Australian history. The difference in the convict experience, the timing of self-government, the 1890s, the lack of conflict between pastoralists and farmers, church and state, and labour and capital, and the development by the state rather than individuals of dairy farming show that many of the all-Australian historical themes are inapplicable or mistimed in Western Australia.

²⁰Crowley, F.K., 'Problems in Local and Regional History', Early Days (V) II, 1956, pp 19-28.

²¹*ibid*, pp 20-22.

To overcome such inadequacies, Crowley proposed a hierarchical model that sought to totalise Australian history into a truly 'national' story. National history is to have its "proper position" at the apex of the pyramid, district and local history constituting the broad base. Regional and state history is superimposed upon this structure. The boundaries of regions and districts have to be clearly defined, and their varying stages of growth ascertained:

Historical research will then be a corporate activity to which each scholar contributes in terms of the relation of his own field of study, geographically and historically, to the whole.²²

Such a means will enable Western Australian history to 'correct' inadequacies in national history. This total, or national, history would reflect the national society, composed of a diverse range of horizontal geo-political layers that are traversed by vertical social groupings. Professional historians occupy one such vertical space, while the amateur, by definition a non-professional, only exists on the margins and more properly occupies an 'other' space.

Crowley's Western Australia is a concrete reality. He concludes Problems in Local and Regional History with an analogy between the historian and the judge. Both summon all available witnesses and bring in evidence, both try to ensure that the evidence is corroborated independently, both endeavour to establish the main facts which are in doubt by inference from known facts. The difference is that the historian can pronounce a verdict of 'almost not guilty', or 'so much guilty or not guilty', and so on. The 'problem' in local and regional history is that the historian cannot be judged by universal criteria. Only the properly trained historian can apportion responsibility for historical events, and therefore know the true value of a historians work²³.

In this manner Crowley appropriated gentry historical writing, not challenging it but incorporating it into the academy, creating a 'new gentryism'. Only the professional historian can judge the worth of another historian, and clearly the work of 'amateur' historians has been found wanting. Amateurs can contribute by "...correcting much error and by bringing to light and preserving documentary and oral evidence not hitherto known to exist..."²⁴, but only the professionals can write 'true' history. This true history is, of course, the history of the Western Australia created by Crowley. By definition, the amateurs are almost non-Western Australian, but by accepting Crowley's modernisation of gentryism they can be accorded handmaiden status. As with the changing relationship between masters and servants, the change is accepted by both professionals and amateurs as being for the common good - which in this case is Western Australian history. The consensus, however, has been manufactured by the professionals, just as it was by the masters.

²²*ibid*, p 25.

²³*ibid*, pp 27-28.

²⁴*ibid*, p 22.

IV

Crowley then wrote a chapter on 'Education and the State' in Alexander's Four Bishops and their See in 1958, before attempting his first general history of Western Australia²⁵. A Short History of Western Australia appeared in its first edition in 1959, and a second, co-revised edition with Brian de Garis appeared in 1968²⁶. This was an abridged version used as a standard school text for many years of Australia's Western Third which was published the following year²⁷.

The titlepage of Australia's Western Third carried the dedication that "The prize of history is the understanding of modern times". 'The modern times of 1960 can be understood through new gentryism' is perhaps the subtext of this dedication. A Short History's chapter one 'Early Days: 1826-1849' is Western Third's chapter one 'Foundation: 1826-1849', while chapter two 'Convicts to the Rescue: 1850-1869' becomes chapter two 'Pioneering: 1850-1869'. The early settlers have laid the foundations of Western Australia today, and the convicts have become pioneers - at least *en masse*. This general elevation of the early days from failure and the chain gang to the respectability of foundation building and pioneering is part of the correction of the inadequacies of earlier general histories that the professional historian is able to achieve by proper training and access to public records.

A glance through the index will find entries for a number of facets of Western Australia that had not usually been considered as part of its general history, but which suggest the totality of Crowley's national history:

- Atomic bombs, 288, 371
- Beer gardens, 329, 368
- Class distinctions, 25-6, 124-5
- Dwalgup clover, 296
- Emu Bitter, 328
- Flogging, 30, 34-5, 42
- Golf, 234
- Hebrew Church, 237
- Italians, 268, 337, 346
- Jersey Cattle, 299
- Kerosene, 207, 233, 251
- Larrikinism, 369
- Margarine, 345
- Neon signs, 351
- Observatory, 146
- Prostitutes, 118, 236

²⁵Alexander, F., (Ed) Four Bishops and their See; Perth Western Australia, 1857-1957, Nedlands 1957.

²⁶Crowley, F.K., A Short History of Western Australia, London 1959: Melbourne 1970.

²⁷Crowley, F.K., Australia's Western Third: a history of Western Australia from the first settlements to modern times, London 1960.

Quoits, 121
Ringbarking, 104, 136, 205, 214
Socialism, 185, 188, 271
£34 Million Agreement, 203
Tinned-dog, 89, 103
Used-car dealers, 363
Vlaming, W., 3
Wildflowers, 12, 79
X-rays, 368
Y.M.C.A., 193
Zamia palm, 45

Over 24 two columned, small print pages Crowley managed to index something under every letter of the alphabet. The new gentryist Western Australia seemed to be all-encompassing. An entry such as 'prostitutes' seems to indicate a view of history that is agentryist, but the prostitutes are Japanese and in Broome, safely foreign and 'other', signifying what is non-Western Australian and clearly demarking the boundary of Western Australian history. The entries for 'Dwalgup clover', 'kerosene', ringbarking' and 'tinned dog' mark the further absorption of rural settlers into the pioneer pantheon; while 'beer gardens', 'golf', 'neon signs' and 'used-car dealers' bring the urban dwellers into Western Australian history.

The problem, however, is that within this total history of Western Australia, ringbarking and womens suffrage, kerosene and the Aborigines Protection Board, class distinctions and the Crowley baths, soil conservation and soap factories are all accorded roughly equal importance as events with little formal analysis to tie them together, so that Western Third tends to become 'one damn thing after another'. The few individuals that are mentioned tend to be the Great Men, notably Sir John Forrest, while extensive space is given to economic and political developments. There are no amateurs in Western Third, only the successful professionals. Australia's Western Third could be considered as the *apogée* of new gentryism. However, in reaching this very zenith, new gentryism can be seen as simply the old emperor in modern clothes, and rather transparent ones at that.

A clear example of the same basic allegiances of old and new gentryism can be seen in Crowley's discussion of contact between the Nyungar and the settlers. It is the same story that can be found in Battye and other gentryists. The Aboriginal population was small and offered little resistance; they were no match for European arms; some were shot stealing food; habitual offenders were sent to Rottne; the Battle of Pinjarra in 1834 was retaliation for the murder of several settlers; more Aborigines died from diseases than bullets; the New Norcia Mission was the first attempt to educate aborigines in European ways. This is the first mention of Aborigines, and it does not occur until page 18, in the second-last paragraph of the first chapter. The description of the geographical spread of the settler's frontier imitates the boundary of Western Australian history, which so very obviously excludes

any understanding of Aborigines other than as objects of colonial administration - especially the justice system.

Reverence for the Great Man has been increased, and the flock of faithful Pioneers has been substantially expanded. The state is now a benign structure that allows the value of each citizen's contribution to the whole to be assessed and used by other citizens properly qualified for such a task. The historian, imbued with the mystique of 'training', is able to determine the correct version of events in the past and the present, this being his (inevitably his) proper role in the body corporate. Crowley's Western Australia is a corporate state utilising the resources of capital and labour, women and men, black and white to provide the greatest common good. The non-Western Australians, such as the prostitutes and the Aborigines, are expelled as strange, enslaved as tools but excluded as human beings.

The historian is especially privileged because he, like the judge and the Great Man, is able to summon the facts, apportion responsibility, and determine the truth. Through Australia's Western Third, Crowley determined who and what was Western Australia and who and what was not. 'Western Australia' has been recast, with the basic gentry consensus intact but now professionalised and more able to continue its domination of the field of history in Western Australia.

Having created a Western Australia and chronicled its history, Crowley turned his attention to local history with Westralian Suburb in 1962²⁸. The history was commissioned by the South Perth City Council, although its reason for doing so is not stated. South Perth had been declared a city in 1959, which was rapidly followed by the opening of the Narrows Bridge and Kwinana Freeway, and in 1960 of the South Perth Civic Centre²⁹. Crowley states in his conclusions that:

To the historians of future years...the story of South Perth will appear to fall naturally into two divisions - before and after the spanning of the Narrows.³⁰

An arrangement of photographs in the final chapter of the new civic centre, the new Narrows bridge and freeway, the Mayor and City Councillors of 1962, and the permanent Council officers suggests that the book was commissioned to mark this accession from arcadian backwater to metropolitan hub.

Westralian Suburb carries the hallmarks of gentryism, best typified in the following passage:

In 1929, a century after the first settlers had forcibly dispossessed the aborigines of the district and frightened to death many of the

²⁸Crowley, F.K., Westralian Suburb: the history of South Perth, Western Australia, Perth 1962.

²⁹*ibid*, 'chronology of events', p 118.

³⁰*ibid*, p111.

picturesque black swans, the colonists' suburban descendants constituted a remarkably peaceful and conforming community. No riots or revolutions had marred their history. There had been no violent economic fluctuations, no mass unemployment, no abject poverty, no great division between rich and poor, and no political or religious issues on which to divide public opinion. South Perth - predominantly Anglican, Puritan, and Conformist - was not scarified by sectarianism or raked by deep social distrusts.³¹

The symbolic year of 1829 magically removed the local Nyungar from history and disturbed the local environment. But, it was a fertile land, and the settler society that flourished upon it was one of harmony, equality and co-operation guaranteed by social homogeneity.

Westralian Suburb is an interesting local history, following Crowley's usual pattern of avoiding personalities except for the Great Men, blending all others into social groups of some sort, and corporatising South Perth's history as one of interaction between these groups, wherein political success is defined by the ability of the whole community to produce stable, long-term municipal leaders. Almost all the groups defined are various combinations of middle-class Anglo men who manufacture the consensus for the common good in South Perth. If new gentryism was a practical working theory, then it should be reproducible at local as well as national level. Westralian Suburb is, in many ways, Australia's Western Third writ small.

The early years of Crowley's writing in Western Australia had seemed exciting as he constructed his model of professional history, the true history of the real Western Australia. His true history, however, was a theoretical base for gentryism, and once applied to writing a general history it inevitably produced a gentryist history not that distinguishable from the work of Battye and Colebatch except in the expanded size of the pioneer pantheon.

Crowley's final contribution before leaving Western Australia was Western Australian History 1952-1964: retrospect and prospect, published in 1964³². Overall, Crowley was happy with the development of new gentryism over the last decade:

The achievements in Western Australian historiography since 1952 have been considerable, but very uneven.³³

He nominated the convict system, the mining industry, pastoral and agricultural development before 1901 and Western Australia at war as four areas in urgent need of the historians attention. The history of Western Australian relations within the Indian Ocean and Pacific regions also required attention, especially as:

³¹*ibid*, p 85.

³²Crowley, F.K., 'Western Australian History 1952-1964: retrospect and prospect', University Studies in History (IV) 2, 1963-64, pp 9-34.

³³*ibid*, p. 32

Western Australians will become more conscious of their position as white settlers facing great nations of nationally conscious non-Europeans³⁴

It is in this final article that Crowley finally acknowledges his gentryism:

[*Australia's Western Third*] did not intend to 'replace' the earlier works of Kimberly and Battye, but rather to complement them by providing a more effective bridge between colonial history, national history and contemporary affairs. The earlier works will continue to remain standard references on many aspects of the early colonial period, which they examine in detail.³⁵

Stannage stated in 1985 that:

Other historians with the [gentryist] tradition, at times questioning it, but never escaping from it, include Professor F.K. Crowley in his *Australia's Western Third*...³⁶.

Crowley never escaped gentryism because he never really wanted to.

V

The questions posed at the beginning of this essay were *how have the subjective and collective meanings of Western Australia as a category of identity been constructed?*, and *what have been the effects of such constructions?* A number of conclusions regarding these questions can now be made with regard to the 1950s and early 1960s.

That an orthodoxy has existed in historical writing on Western Australia since the 1890s has been outlined by Stannage and Bolton³⁷. This orthodoxy has been named gentryism, and until the 1950s it had largely been an amateur pursuit organised to a large degree by the Western Australian Historical Society. The methodology of this 'old gentryism', as typified in much of the material published in *Early Days*, was that of reminiscence. The histories of the Society by Birtwistle and Hasluck are both examples of reminiscence gentryism³⁸. The intellectual component of old gentryism can be found in the works of its Great Men, such as Battye and Colebatch, whose methodology could be described as reportage. Both men had academic and journalistic experience, and their histories tend to be meticulous reporting of political and economic history in the manner of the objective reporter. But, whether of the reminiscence or reportage style, old gentryism had no specifically articulated theoretical underpinning.

³⁴*ibid*, p. 34.

³⁵*ibid*, p. 12.

³⁶*Pioneer myth*, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

³⁷*ibid*; and Bolton, G.C., 'Western Australia reflects on its Past', in Stannage, C.T. (Ed) *A New History of Western Australia*, Nedlands 1981, chapter 22 *passim* (hereafter - *WA reflects*)

³⁸Birtwistle, I.T., 'Royal W.A. Historical Society: recollections of its First Decade (1926-1936)', *Early Days* (VII) II, 1970, pp 39-56; Hasluck, Sir P., 'The Founding of the Society: some personal reminiscences', *Early Days* (VIII) I, 1977, pp 7-22.

Crowley was able to take the credo of consensus and exclusivism in gentryism, and 'modernise' the orthodoxy while retaining these fundamentals. His first move was essentially a political move designed to gain some acceptance within the local historical community. This he did by publishing articles in Early Days, and by footnoting his use of private records (usually reminiscences) in his articles. The 'amateurs' journal gained increased status and the footnoting affirmed the correctness of these remembrances. Publication of The Records of Western Australia was a crucial event in the formation of 'new gentryism'. By this work, the magisterial role of the professional historian was established by his naming of what was and was not Western Australian.

Thus, with a group of followers and a basic theoretical knowledge, Crowley was able to reaffirm the basic gentry values of consensus and exclusivism by showing how these regional qualities had been naturally determined by the planting of traditional English values in the new colonial environment. The social élite in this real place were the true Western Australians, who could be easily identified by the label of Pioneer. The real structure of Western Australian society was in the nature of the corporate state, with professional guilds uniting employers and employees. Such an organisation of common interests avoided class and political conflict and promoted consensus as negotiated by the interest-neutral state. The Secession campaign and referendum of 1933, and the acceptance of the King's refusal to intervene, are an example of Western Australian society working in this way.

Such a model for 'national' history was created by Crowley to correct inadequacies in historical research and allow the true history of Western Australia to be discovered. Crowley's national history, although clothed with the rhetoric of Australianism, was an explanation of Western Australian regionalism. Westralian nationalism was simply the new gentryism. The pioneers were the new gentry, and Western Australia was their nation. The professional historian was an essential part of this body corporate as he alone could adjudicate and decide upon the historical correctness of this parochial nationalism. To be a student-apprentice, or an amateur devotee, or an academic leader, the new gentryism had to be accepted as the definitive Western Australian history if the history being researched was to be accepted by writer's peers.

This construction by Crowley has had a number of effects, some of which are still evident today.

The first was the creation of a new form of gentryism that was dynamic and robust. It maintained the dominance of a eurocentric colonial discourse in public and intellectual affairs from the 1950s to the mid-1970s. This academic gentryism was able to resist the intrusion of other forms of historical interpretation into Western Australian historical research. Marxism, psychoanalysis, feminism, and literary criticism failed to influence Westralian historiography until after the revisionists began their assault on new

gentryism in 1976³⁹. Crowley's apparent project of developing a total model for the explanation of history is not exceptional for his time, but far from being original, he was in fact strengthening the *status quo*.

The Western Australia for which Crowley's records speak cannot be the voice of Western Australia 'as it was'. It is the voice of a Western Australia constructed in the mid-twentieth century. Thus, Crowley's review of writing on Aboriginal history in 1964 concerns missionary activity, welfare systems, and the extension of political rights to Aborigines. Anthropological work on traditional and contemporary Aboriginal societies "will be of great assistance to historians of government and mission welfare policies."⁴⁰ Aborigines only exist as the other, the non-Western Australian, tools for the development of Western Australian (white) professions such as anthropologists and historians, but of no inherent 'historical' significance. Thus, new gentryism actively worked to reinforce racism and white supremacy within both the historian's guild and the wider Western Australian community.

The role of amateur historical societies in the historian's guild has been adversely affected by new gentryism. In 1952, they had been the constituency Crowley had to win in order to reform gentryism. Professionalism, however, will not allow a blending with amateurism. Rather, within the historian's guild constituted by Crowley there exists a hierarchy in which the amateurs occupy a marginal place, some still clinging to old gentryism in the form of genealogy or biography. The role of the professional is equated by the amateurs with the 'un-real' and the distant ivory tower. There is a communication gap that is ignored by the professionals and bemoaned by the amateurs.⁴¹ This acute gap was acknowledged by the President of the RWAHS in her 1991 report:

That personal element is also present...as our policy is to collect material which relates to known individuals who lived in Western Australia. This manifests the close connection with our past; an intimate knowledge of our forebears is there for the asking. The members themselves are often descendants and knowledgeable about the early families.⁴²

³⁹1976 is probably a fairly arbitrary point, but I date the revisionist challenge from Stannage's 'Uncovering Poverty in Australian History', which occasioned some rancorous debate with the Historical Society establishment. See: *Early Days* (VII) VIII, 1976; 'Council Notes', *RWAHS Newsletter* (14) 1, January-February 1975, p12, 'Council Notes', *ibid*, (14) 6, July 1975, and 'President's Annual-General Meeting Report, 26th March 1976', *ibid*, (15) 3, April 1976; also for a restatement of the gentryist position see Bolton, G., 'A Local Identity: Paul Hasluck and Western Australian self concept', *Westerly* (4) December 1977.

⁴⁰*retrospect and prospect*, *op. cit.*, pp, 28-29.

⁴¹for a recent discussion of this situation in Victoria, see: Else-Mitchell, R., and McDonald, D.I., 'History On and Off the Campus', *Royal Historical Society of Victoria Journal* (57) 3, September 1986, pp 1-8.

⁴²Medcalf, M., 'President's Report for the year ending 31 December 1991', *Early Days* (10) 3, 1991, p 210.

The confusion of old reminiscence gentryism and new gentryism evident in the president's report reflects the marginalisation of the amateurs, perhaps even their wilful neglect by professionals no longer dependent upon their approval. There is a question of whether the historian's guild still exists - it seems that a paradoxical effect of new gentryism has been, ultimately, to destroy the consensus in Western Australian historical writing. Or, perhaps it simply staved off a such a rupture for twenty years: a comparison with such events in other states would be useful in this regard.

Bolton wrote in 1979 that:

there can be no serious doubt that Crowley's presence in Perth gave the study of Western Australian history an impressive stimulus which placed it far in advance of any other state; and which has still to be rivalled.⁴³

Crowley's stimulus was that of modernising and reinforcing the *status quo* in a post-war Western Australia of economic growth and social change. His professionalised new gentryism ensured that the old colonial vision remained intact and reinvigorated, and it ensured that the stream of new historians being produced by the University remained firmly within that conservative mainstream. As Stannage has said of Crowley's pupil:

Geoffrey Bolton may not have entirely escaped [gentryism] either.⁴⁴

⁴³WA *Reflects*, *op. cit.*, p. 686.

⁴⁴*Pioneer myth*, *op. cit.*, p 3.

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