

AUSTRALIAN STORY/BACK STORY

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Townsville International Women's Conference - AUSTRALIA



3 - 7 July 2002 ~ James Cook University
"Poverty, Violence and Women's Rights:
...Setting a Global Agenda"

This international conference is for all who care passionately about improving women's position in the world, who demand justice and full human rights for women everywhere and who believe that a feminist analysis is essential to defining a fairer globalised world.

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Her photograph
on the frontpage
of the *Age*
eyes smiling
is taken beside a picketfence

She's fourteen
fifty years ago
baby fat
corsetted
in serge pleated uniform

He stands
adjacent
separate photograph
legs astride, arms akimbo
balding

He's smiling, too
predatory
over his white collar
turned backwards.

There's a wave
in the fringe
on her forehead
wide/smiling eyes
her collar
turned frontwards
school tie knotted tight

He, in turn, wears no tie
no bow tie
theologians rarely do
the ties that bind
for them
far stronger
rope
spoken from the pulpit
snaring lambs

She's trapped, lamb-like, this one
a rabbit caught in promises
in a barbed-wire fence
of caring

Caring - that's what he says
loco parentis
and what's a pastor for?

She
features
babysoft
smile
puppyfat
podgy

Her photograph shows smile, girlish
(she's just a girl, you know)
lashes pale
gaze open
eyebrown unplucked
guarding nothing
nothing guarded
guilelessly vulnerable.

His photograph
shows tough hands
large feet
big
teeth

Red Riding Hood's grandmother
turned wolf
tearing
at her youth/smile gone/clouded

Hunter he
he hunted her/innocence
predatory
he's guilt, ordained
yet she's named as huntress
she's labelled predator
the Queen's man so called
names her guilty
the temptress in the plot

He's fed
on chump chops
jaws slavering
lips lascivious
greedy gob grasping
gasping
he's fed
up
to her backteeth
grinding
her breath away.

Dead childhood
taken
soul dispensed with
for the asking
his asking
from the pulpit
in the study
fed chocolate
to tempt her
take her dreams
away
into his head.

Yesterday/last month/last week
on television
the world
saw it/turned
upside down
'it was more the other way around' said his confessor
in confessional
Australian story

our
virtual
head of state

14/27
she the wicked webspinner
he embroiled
for what's a man to do
so sayeth the archbishop's lesson
teaching her another one,
a lesson yet again
for fear she's forgot the first

It's the governor general talking
head of state substitute
what head
whose head
empty head
head leaking
absent brains
brainpower lacking
compassion finite
marked 'for men only'
let no woman enter here.

And all of us,
out here
outside the Australian story
where do we stand
what story do we tell
whose side do we take
when there are no sides, not really

It's a photograph
on the frontpage
of the *Age*
caught beside a picketfence
growing ivy.

At fourteen
her gaze is captured
looking out
at us
50 years on.

JAS
7 March 2002