

THE AUSTRALIAN ACADEMY OF THE HUMANITIES



Annual Lecture
2004

TEDDY ROOSEVELT'S TROPHY:
HISTORY AND NOSTALGIA

Iain McCalman
President, Australian Academy of the Humanities

Delivered at
Dechaineaux Theatre (School of Art), University of Tasmania, Hobart
19 November 2004

At the end of every Christmas dinner during my boyhood in Central Africa my Mother used to bring out from the sideboard what she called *bon bon* dishes containing lollies and nuts. These dishes, beautiful in their way, looked to be made of lacquered tortoiseshell with silver rims and silver ball feet. But their special status in the family had nothing to do with aesthetics. Scratched crudely on their honey-coloured sides were the initials 'LJT from TR', and they were actually the toenails of the first bull elephant shot by ex-President Theodore Roosevelt on his famous Kenya safari of 1909–10. He had given them as a commemorative trophy to my Australian great-uncle Leslie Jefferies Tarlton in gratitude for organising and leading the safari.

I like to think that as soon as my sister and I learnt that these delicate objets d'art had been hacked from a stately wild elephant they became grotesque in our eyes, but this would be to read back from later adult perspectives. In fact, for some years after our migration to Australia in the mid-1960s the dishes were magnets for multiple secret nostalgias – they reminded my father of his Kenyan boyhood, my mother of being a white *Dona* in the Central African Raj, and my sister and me of African Christmases past.

I have chosen the dishes for my meditation on history and nostalgia because they are clearly icons of imperial memory and commemoration, and also because, indirectly, they constitute a personal link with Tasmania. The toenails, along with several other relics from Roosevelt – a twelve bore shotgun and an air-rifle – were passed on to my father by his maternal uncle Captain Eliot Tarlton, who was born in Launceston around 1889. The Australian family patriarch, Robert Tarlton, a successful South Australian banker, politician and grazier had moved his large family to Tasmania that year hoping the climate would improve his eldest son's tuberculosis. In fact, young Tatham's condition worsened, leading him to try the famed dry air of the Transvaal Highlands, which was thought to be conducive to bronchial healing. The migration to South Africa of Robert Tarlton's two eldest sons, combined with news of the Rand gold seams, convinced him to shift the entire family to South Africa in 1894.¹

Tatham died within the year but the three remaining older sons, who had learnt to ride and shoot on the rugged family property at Emu Plain near the Gawler Ranges, fought in the Boer War with the South Australia Mounted Rifles. Afterwards, Leslie, his brother Henry, and an Adelaide friend, Victor Newland, joined a straggling band of Australian and British ex-soldiers who trekked to British and German East Africa in search of fortune. Some of these adventurers purchased tracts of bushland or were allotted soldier-settlements in the British East African Highlands but the less

successful began hiring themselves as professional guides for foreign sportsmen attracted by the abundance and exoticism of East African game.

Small, wiry, red-headed Leslie Tarlton arrived in the village of Nairobi in 1903 when it was hardly more than a few tin shacks, but he quickly sensed the potential of the safari industry. The following year he, brother Henry and their Adelaide mate, Vic Newland, pieced together a capital sum of two hundred pounds. They signed up the half-dozen hunters of the district, erected a sign 'Newland and Tarlton Safari Outfitters' over a tin shed, and dispatched a well-connected Englishman to trawl for custom in the club-lands of London's West End. Newland and Tarlton, known as 'N and T', was the first business of its kind in Africa and probably the most successful ever.²

Running safaris from remote Nairobi was a complex business: Victor Newland managed the finances and Leslie Tarlton the logistics. Each client required thirty porters carrying a sixty-pound load of supplies for a safari that could last between three months to a year. They needed tents, guns, ammunition, medicines, mosquito nets, preserving equipment, portable beds, baths and chairs, food, water and, of course, bottles of champagne – which apparently fared better on the swaying heads of bearers than ordinary wine. The safari would march out of Nairobi in a serpentine column of porters and gun-bearers, all wearing blue uniforms embroidered with the red initials 'N and T'. For comfort, most porters carried their boots strung emblematically around their necks. As the small white community applauded through a haze of gin from the *stoep* of the Stanley Hotel, *kudu* horns sounded, the safari clown chanted a marching song and *askaris* shouldered arms to prevent last-minute desertions. Clients, immaculately clothed in bush-jackets by a local Asian tailor, mounted their mules or ponies, knowing that their comfort and safety for the next months rested entirely on the vigilance and shooting skill of a professional white hunter.³

Leslie Tarlton frequently served in the latter capacity himself. The US photographer Carl Akeley's famous hunting memoir, *In Brightest Africa* (1927), claimed that Leslie was 'one of the best rifle shots of all time'.⁴ He was also a fine horseman able to round up a hundred ostriches careering at speed across the savannah – perhaps growing up on Emu Plain had given him practice. He helped perfect the local hunting speciality known as 'riding lion': this entailed chasing lion through the long grass on horseback until the animal turned at bay, usually at a distance of around thirty-five yards. The horseman then dismounted and shot the beast as it charged at over forty miles per hour.⁵ Needless to say it was a hazardous business: Leslie was twice mauled, and several of his stable of white hunters were ultimately killed.

It is difficult to tell from Leslie's matter-of-fact letters how conscious he was of operating a white nostalgia business, but that is what it was. Even the term 'white hunter', with its half-comical overtones of race and the Raj, sounds uncomfortably archaic today, though it actually originated from wordplay on the name of a Scottish-born hunter, Alan Black, who had to be distinguished from a black Somali hunter on

the same payroll.⁶ There's no doubt, though, that the colony of Kenya was a magnet for wistful white fantasies. Again and again Theodore Roosevelt in *African Game Trails* describes it as a perfect site to become a 'white man's country'.⁷ My father's near-neighbour in Thika, Elspeth Huxley, used the same phrase without irony as the title for an influential book of 1935, in which she also called Kenya a literal fulfilment of 'Rider Haggard's dream'.⁸

Being on the equator at more than 5000 feet above sea level, Kenya's high country had a climate and picturesque beauty that made it unusually healthy and congenial for disease-susceptible whites. Rich volcanic soil, abundant water, a large potential workforce and, of course, a plethora of wildlife, completed the appeal. Almost from its first European settlement in the 1890s, British East Africa became what today would be called an 'anachronistic enclave'.⁹ Two nostalgic fantasies proved especially potent. To a small elite of Britons and Europeans, Kenya became a playground for re-enacting the pleasures of a fading aristocracy; and to a string of wealthy Americans, the savannahs promised a chance to live out the frontier romance of the vanishing Wild West.

Of the aristocrats who came to Kenya some had real blue-blood lineages, including the sporty Lord Cranworth who became a Director of 'N and T'. Others were adventure-loving younger sons of minor noble twigs. Most, including the legendary Swede, Baron Blore Blixen-Finecke and his wife, Karen, were desperately trying to escape the decline and fall of their kind. In Kenya, these aristocratic avatars could still afford large tracts of cheap land on which to run cattle or grow coffee. They could hunt the abundant game, drink the famous cocktails of the Mathaiga Club, and bet on the races at the East African Turf Club (where another Australian uncle, Henry Tarlton, was the only professional jockey). Wilder spirits, such as the novelist Evelyn Waugh on his several visits, could gravitate to the 'Happy Valley' set who lived the life of 'Bright Young Things' in a fever of drink, cocaine and fornication.¹⁰ The lure of the white man's country extended even to British royalty. Leslie organised special safaris during the 'thirties for both the philandering Prince of Wales, later Edward VIII, and his quieter brother the Duke of York, later George VI.¹¹ At its best this aristocratic Eldorado could produce the type of pastoral idyll made famous by Karen Blixen's *Out of Africa*,¹² but it could also be snobbish, philistine and deeply exploitative.

A now nearly forgotten nexus also existed between Kenya and the Wild West. It originated with the burly US millionaire William Northrop Macmillan who, after being shipwrecked exploring the Blue Nile gorge, bought a major landholding north of Nairobi in 1905.¹³ His connections and stories soon drew Mid-Western rancher Edgar Beecher Bronson in search of pristine hunting country. Another wealthy family, the Kleins,¹⁴ bought a farm near ours at Eldoret, and Al Klein joined 'N and T' as the first of several American-born white hunters. Even the Commissioner of Guaso Nyero had once been a Wyoming 'cow puncher'.¹⁵ Soon the famous 'lunatic line' from Mombasa to Nairobi was chugging a stream of American adventurers to the doors of

'N and T'. Australian white hunter George Outram led the Ohio banker Kenyon Painter on the first of Painter's 41 eventual safaris. Carl Akeley's 'Field Museum' safari of 1906 with Leslie Tarlton and R. J. Cunninghame produced a mauling from a leopard in Somaliland and the foundations of Akeley's later hunting memoir. Preacher-author W. S. Rainsford's safari of 1908 generated his influential *The Land of the Lion*, published the following year.¹⁶

These fervent hunting testimonials, including Wild West novelist Stewart Edward White's *The Land of Footprints* (1913), incited aspirant US adventurers to try ever more risky ways of testing their frontier manhood. In 1925, Leslie took the pioneer US archer and western writer Dr Sexton Pope on safari to hunt lion with his bow and arrow, some from as close as 12 yards. He killed seven, though Leslie forbade him from shooting at buffalo, elephant and rhino for fear of merely wounding the animals. One of Pope's cast-off yew bows, nicknamed 'Shenzi' – Swahili for 'useless' – was for years mounted on the back stoep of our family farm.¹⁷ No species restriction was placed on Colonel Charles 'Buffalo' Jones, Zane Grey's legendary 'Last Plainsman', who brought over a squad of trained Texas horses and lasso experts to round up hippo, lion and rhino, which he then paraded through the streets of Nairobi.¹⁸

The ideological ground was already well prepared for Theodore Roosevelt when he decided to mount a major Kenyan safari at the completion of his second term of office in 1909. By this time Roosevelt was suffering acute nostalgia for the vanishing landscapes and values of the Wild West. His political and personal identity had been built on a frontier mythos: he was Teddy Roosevelt, buckskin bear-hunter, rancher of the South Dakota badlands, and horseback Colonel who had led a band of 'Rough Riders' on dare-devil charges in the Spanish-American War. Since his election to Congress in 1882, he had issued scores of works advocating the values of muscular and civilised American manhood, an ideal supposedly forged in the dusty crucible of the West and destined to spread throughout the world at the expense of weak or barbaric peoples.¹⁹

Roosevelt knew that the raw Wild West had by 1909 become a mirage: railroads and cities had devoured the plains; red-eyed Texas Longhorns had become placid Herefords; Indians had been shunted into reservations; and Buffalo Bill was a circus entertainer.²⁰ Roosevelt, typically, had taken action to halt the trend. Memories of his boyhood nature-collecting and excited reading of Mayne Reid's buffalo-hunting romances underlay his adoption of a vigorous conservation program. By 1909 he had started a national forest system, passed a National Monuments Act, established sixteen national parks and monuments including Yellowstone and the Grand Canyon, and created fifty-one bird reservations.²¹ Evidently, though, the conservationist-minded Dr Jekyll in him still longed to become the predatory Mr Hyde for one last time.

Roosevelt's dream of hunting in Africa started early in life when he was intoxicated by Rider Haggard's epic stories about the ice-cool white hunter Alan Quartermaine, hero of *King Solomon's Mines*. Years later the President invited both Rider Haggard and

his real-life inspiration for Quartermaine, Frederick Courtney Selous, to the White House. Selous, a legendary South African explorer and naturalist, became the President's intimate friend, and the Roosevelt children were raised on nightly readings from his African Nature Notes. Another White House invitee, Carl Akeley, fed Roosevelt's cowboy fantasies with tales of Leslie Tarlton's galloping hunts, and of Kenya's Dodge City, Nairobi, where drunks and lions shambled up the dusty streets.²²

Roosevelt prepared for the safari by a painstaking course of reading and consultation. He pored over gun catalogues and supplemented his custom-made Springfield .38 and western classic .405 Winchester with hand-tailored heavy-gauge rifles and shotguns from the British gunsmiths Holland and Holland, each fitted with special telescopic sights to cope with his poor vision. His double-barrelled Holland 450–500 elephant gun could stop a small tank.²³ He also steeped himself in works on East African flora and fauna using his reputation as a naturalist to persuade the Smithsonian Institute in Washington to fund the safari as a scientific expedition. The remainder of an estimated half-million dollars came from Roosevelt's billionaire friend Andrew Carnegie and from advances on the books and stories that the ex-President agreed to write.²⁴

Outfitting the massive year-long expedition turned 'N and T' into one of the largest private businesses in Africa. The safari was an East African microcosm: Goanese cooks, Afghan camel-drivers, Arab guides, Somali gunbearers and askaris, Wakamba trackers and skimmers, Australian and British-born white hunters, and 500 Wanyumwezi, Luo, Kavirondo, Kikuyu and Swahili *pagazi* or porters.²⁵ The single-file line extended for a full mile, carrying, among other things, Roosevelt's sixty favourite books and quantities of Boston beans and American gingersnaps. Each evening the 'stars and stripes' fluttered from Roosevelt's tent. 'Bwana King ya Amerik' was in a state of mystical rapture. The native bearers seemed to him to have come, childlike, straight from the bowels of the Pleistocene age.²⁶ The landscape reminded him of the great plains and the foothills of the Rockies, and he equated the settlers – whether American, English, Afrikaans or Australian – directly with the manly type of the American West. Sometimes he felt himself transported back thirty years to the habitats of his youth, sometimes seventy years to the time of Western buffalo hunters and African explorers armed only with muzzle-loaders.²⁷ Still more exhilarating was to be taken to the Lado enclave, East Africa's equivalent of the badlands, where freelance hunters gathered to poach ivory across the borders of Somaliland and the Congo. Roosevelt was thrilled by the rough masculine camaraderie of this 'hard-bit set'; they in turn respected his courage though were bemused by his refusal to drink.²⁸

Roosevelt's famous later account, *African Game Trails*, fails, however, to reveal the gap that sometimes yawned between these heroic fantasies and the realities of the safari business. Equating himself with manly predecessors like the hunters Chapman and Buxton, he omits to mention women like Mary Kingsley and Agnes and Cecily Herbert, who had undertaken far more dangerous hunts on foot without professional

guides.²⁹ In Roosevelt's case, moreover, the professionals had to ensure that a slow, overweight man with poor eyesight, riding a dumpy little pony, could bag his share of trophies without enduring too much hardship or risk. The task was complicated by Roosevelt's habit of opening fire on game he could scarcely see, at distances of 300 to 600 yards, when most professional hunters regarded 100 yards as excessive. Frequently his bullets fell short or merely wounded game, and he compensated for poor shooting by pouring fusillades of bullets into his targets. Underlying strains of jealousy and melancholy in *African Game Trails* hint at his insecurity about living up to the sporting standards of the men he so admired.³⁰ He was thrilled when Swahili porters addressed him as 'Bwana Mkubwa', or Great Master, but he omitted to mention their usual nickname for him of 'Bwana Tumbo' or 'Mr Big Belly'. His son, the unfortunately named Kermit, fared no better: he was given the unflattering nickname of 'Bwana Maridari' or 'Mr Fancy-Pants'.³¹

In *African Game Trails*, Roosevelt had also to reconcile the primitive urge to gather trophies with his countervailing ethic of conservation. Like most white hunters at the time, he justified his carnage on the grounds of the abundance of wildlife in East Africa and of the nuisance value that animals like lion posed to the white civilising mission. By the end of the safari he and Kermit had, between them, killed 512 animals from over eighty species, a tally, which – Roosevelt later claimed in his own defence – was relatively modest compared with some safaris. Maybe so; but at a time when the white rhino was on the verge of extinction and Roosevelt explicitly called for its protection, he and Kermit managed to kill nine, including two pregnant cows. They also wounded a further two calves.³² Though Roosevelt glossed over this sorry incident, he did admit in later writings that the East African safari business would eventually have to shift from hunting or witness the same decline in wildlife as the United States.

The contradictions of Roosevelt's position were transmitted directly to succeeding generations of white hunters. On the one hand the safari's vast publicity stimulated a new wave of Western-style hunter-adventurers, including Mississippi coal baron Paul J. Rainey with his lethal pack of lion-hunting dogs, and the colt-toting maverick Charles Cottar, whose safari company survives to this day.³³ Roosevelt's visit also stamped a Western cowboy imprint on the identity of many younger white Kenyan males. Yet, as the game grew scarcer, the Tarlton brothers and others in the business began increasingly to share Roosevelt's concern. When Leslie Tarlton stayed at the Roosevelt ranch in July 1910, he was proudly shown US nature reserves.³⁴ With his hunting lust satiated, Roosevelt's concern to preserve vanishing places and values grew. He mused that as one prepared to face life's 'rifle-pits', the urge to recapture childhood habitats overrode even the primal need to hunt.³⁵

Like those two great imperial pundits Kipling and Rider Haggard, the Tarltons also had their values shaken by the death of relatives in the First World War. Leslie's nephew Lionel Tarlton, aged eighteen, was killed at Longido in the opening battle of

East Africa against the Germans, and his Tasmanian-born younger brother, Eliot, had his leg shattered in the campaign soon after. Three years later, in 1919, the Tarlton brothers decided to dissolve 'N and T', though they encouraged Vic Newland to reconstitute it as a new company called Safariland Ltd. By the time Arthur Conan Doyle visited Kenya at the end of the twenties, Henry Tarlton had turned his ranch at Ruaraka into a small game park,³⁶ and Leslie was campaigning strongly for safari companies to restrict their game quotas.

Of course, my father and many of his generation of Kenyans grew up in a culture where the muscular frontier ethos of Roosevelt was still rampant. In the Kenya of the 1920s and 1930s, guns were as natural a part of life as shoes. The family farm in Solai still teemed with wild animals, and the McCalman boys were expected to shoot francolin, guinea fowl and reedbok for the pot. Dangerous snakes, such as puff-adders, king cobras and mambas, had often to be dispatched with a shotgun. My grandfather Alex McCalman, though always a reluctant hunter, was several times pressured by his labourers to kill rogue lion and elephant on the farm.³⁷ Shooting an elephant, as George Orwell argued in his brilliant essay of that title, was part of the warped obligation which accompanied being a white Sahib or Bwana.³⁸ My father, David McCalman, grew up hearing his uncle's stories and, like most male children of empire, he read Kipling, Haggard, and, that bestselling US creation of the early twentieth century, *Tarzan of the Apes* by Edgar Rice Burroughs.

Clarence E. Mulford, former Western cowboy turned pulp fiction writer, also gave new zest to Western nostalgia during the 1920s and 1930s by inventing the grittily realistic sagebrush sagas of Hopalong Cassidy and the Bar 20 ranch. He inspired young males as geographically dispersed as David McCalman in Solai and Robin Wallace-Crabbe in Melbourne.³⁹ My father's cowboy fantasies were, however, easier to enact than Wallace-Crabbe's, who had to wait until much later in life to become a Braidwood rancher. Young David McCalman carved and fitted ivory stocks to his Colt .22 Police Positive revolver, and, as a vet assistant at Kabete, had to lasso cattle from his Harley Davidson and to ride headlong across the veldt shooting at marauding hyenas.⁴⁰

Yet for this generation of Kenyans the nostalgic hunting dream underwent a decisive shift from seeking corporal to photographic trophies. In December 1928, David McCalman's two prizes at Kenton College in Kijabe comprised a book called *Heroes of Modern Adventure* filled with stories of 'Buffalo Bill's days' and *Photographing Wild Life Across the World* by the legendary US game photographer Cherry Kearton.⁴¹ In the same year, David saw a screening at Kenya's Natural History Museum of US filmmaker Martin Johnson's wildlife documentary *Lake Paradise* shot at nearby Lake Marsabit.⁴² After this, game photography became his passion. During the later 1930s he and a friend, Freddie Pelling – later a celebrated game photographer – would travel each weekend to the rugged bushland around Tsavo and Amboselli to photograph game. Here's a typical extract from his diary for 17 December 1938.

Left Kabete with Freddie in the Plymouth armed with some of my 50% proof, home made, Green Chartreuse. Still very sore where I fell from Boycey's Norton chasing hyenas on Thursday. At the usual place we hid our tracks ... Saw 16 wild dogs chasing a lone Grant's Gazelle; scared them off with a shot from my Colt.45 'Frontier'. Walking down to the waterhole two rhinos came out of the scrub unpleasantly close. Stood stock still til 'Auntie Mame' could see I was human (about 6 yards distant) ... Freddie and I took pictures.⁴³

Those of this generation who did stay in the professional hunting business, such as our cousin Alan Tarlton and David's friends Donald Ker and David Lunan, also turned increasingly to the representation rather than destruction of wildlife. Though there was still a steady trickle of macho clients like Ernest Hemingway, who wanted to test themselves in combat against wild animals, Alan Tarlton and his colleagues preferred working with film-stars Deborah Ker, Clark Gable and Ava Gardener to provide wildlife settings for movies like *King Solomon's Mines*, *The Snows of Kilimanjaro*, and *Mogambo*.⁴⁴ When this market became satiated, many of the same hunters turned into game wardens, protecting the animals they had been licensed to kill. Alan Tarlton became a snake farmer, providing pythons for Hollywood movies and venom for medical uses.

From 1939, of course, David and his generation also displaced their urges for hunting and adventure into war. Roosevelt's old telescopic sight found its uses for him in the Kings African Rifles, fighting against the Italians in Ethiopia and the Japanese in Burma and Ceylon. And even after the war, the possibilities for manly adventure were not quite exhausted. As a District Commissioner working for the British Civil Service from 1947 in the remote bush provinces of Nyasaland, David had to undertake regular safaris on foot to administer British law, collect taxes, dispense medicine, hunt rogue animals, build roads and bridges, and establish the country's first game park at Kasungu.⁴⁵ When I was one, he helped to rescue Laurens Van Der Post from Mulanje Mountain during that explorer's ill-fated *Venture into the Interior*;⁴⁶ when I was four, he was skirmishing with Mau Mau on the farm in Kenya; and, when I was ten, he came close to killing himself in a light plane crash outside Chileka in Nyasaland.⁴⁷

When the British colonial service was officially wound up in Nyasaland at the beginning of 1964 it was probably a form of nostalgia that influenced David to take his family to Australia rather than Britain or South Africa with most of his former colleagues. Thanks to Tarlton family legends, he had always thought of himself as part Australian, and he was undeterred by dire warnings about the yellow peril from his Tasmanian uncle who had left here at the age of nine. Naturally the elephant's toenails came with us to Melbourne to serve as repositories of a type of sacral family nostalgia, a condition of wistful yearning that has always been associated with migration or exile.

In fact, the word 'nostalgia' was originally coined from the Greek in 1688 by one Dr Johannes Hofer to describe the melancholic feelings exhibited by Swiss soldiers

forced to campaign far from the Alpine valleys and tinkling cowbells of home. Hofer thought it a potentially lethal disease, a malady of the imagination transmitted into the brain and viscera through an inflammation of the nervous system.⁴⁸ By the end of the eighteenth century, doctors had added a string of other displaced peoples to the nostalgically stricken, including British sailors on Pacific voyages, European students at foreign universities and African slaves ripped from their homelands.⁴⁹ It was, perhaps, a measure of their respective attitudes to the mother country that most British convicts to Botany Bay and Van Dieman's Land adapted relatively quickly to their new homelands, whereas numbers of their French counterparts in New Caledonia are said to have pined to death for the loss of Paris.

Initially at least, my parents proved surprisingly resistant to the nostalgic condition. They belonged to that stalwart breed of first-generation migrants determined to live in the present. Trotting out the toenails at Christmas dinners was done, for them, in a spirit more ironical than wistful. Though never completely able to stifle their pride in this strange family heirloom, it was also viewed as half a joke, something faintly ridiculous like the whole British-African Raj. Yet nostalgia is difficult to escape. Modern analysts suggest that the condition has ballooned from a *maladie du pays* into a *mal du siecle*. Some now see it as the central cultural malaise of modern man. Once a form of *heimweh* or homesickness confined to a few, it is now socially pervasive, nebulous and insatiable. It's come to connote a yearning for some real or imagined time and place in the past that is suffused in sentiment and purged of pain.⁵⁰ It is also, of course, very big business: tourist, heritage, advertising and popular culture industries of every stamp try to stimulate the gush of backward-looking sentiment that will mobilise people's credit cards.

Modern diagnosticians associate nostalgia with the secularisation and acceleration of time that began in the West with the French Revolution and has now reached such breakneck pace that we long to halt it by conjuring up frozen idylls of the past.⁵¹ A psychic disorder rather than a medical disease, it is seen to afflict especially those who have been subjected to dislocating social and cultural shock, leading to a loss of self-confidence, identity and sense of self-worth. Those caught in transitional phases of the life cycle are thought to be especially susceptible, particularly the aged when faced with social obsolescence.⁵²

Most analysts, or at least those who haven't already crossed into this twilight world, condemn the condition. At best, it is seen as reprehensibly escapist and conservative, a retreat from engagement with present and future realities. At worst, it is a reactionary ideology based on myths of community, race and country, and deployed by xenophobic figures like Osama Bin Laden, George W. Bush, and John Howard.⁵³

There is much truth in these claims, but it is also important to distinguish among the modalities of nostalgia. It has potential for good as well as harm. Though we will probably all feel its siren call at some point, we are not bound to succumb blindly. Nostalgia's powerful energy can also be harnessed or displaced into the creation of

history, art and constructive social policy. Without some variants of nostalgia our heritage and conservation movements would probably lose much of their drive. Without nostalgia, historians would certainly have a reduced audience. After all, nostalgia is a crude form of historical consciousness that at least fosters dialogues between the past and present.⁵⁴ Not every nostalgic sentiment need be simple-minded or anti-intellectual: we can, surely, analyse and question, rather than simply wallow in our longing.

Now in their eighties, my parents have eventually succumbed to wistfulness for their African past. I do not know whether it is because they have crossed a key age threshold or whether they can afford to glance back now they have integrated their children within Australia. Either way, they began around a decade ago to exhibit yearnings for the flora and fauna of Africa. Among other symptoms, they started to make annual pilgrimages to the nature reserves and game parks of East and Central Africa. No doubt there was an element of escapism in this: they were certainly not exploring the slums of Soweto. But I am impressed that they have also channelled their yearnings into creative action. For a start, they took up flower growing – in the case of my father a form of horticultural combat, I guess; he was collecting Protea blooms rather than elephants' toenails. Both of them have become passionate proselytes for South African Protea, out of which they established a prize-winning ecological garden. Perhaps more symbolically, they also helped develop a large public garden in the Dandenongs that integrated South African Protea with the kindred genus of Australian Banksias. Above all, my father undertook the Herculean endeavour of scanning a lifetime worth of African and Australian photographs into digital form and writing a memoir for his grandchildren. Gerontologists dub this a process of 'Life Review', and it is surely one of the most positive of nostalgia's symptoms.

As President of the Australian Academy of the Humanities over the past three years I have often been gripped by a potent nostalgia for a time long ago when the humanities were taken seriously within the university and the wider culture. No doubt this is partly a myth, the melancholia of a male academic in his twilight, but I still feel passionately that no sector of Australian scholarly and intellectual life has suffered more indignity and degradation than ours. I do not have to tell you that some of our key disciplines, including classics and languages, have been subjected to wilful neglect or systematic attack. Often I have felt that the modern Australian university, and the government bureaucracy that feeds it, has become inveterately hostile or contemptuous of humanistic skills and values.

Sometimes I have felt like a hapless dinosaur awaiting extinction as its habitat vanishes. More than once, government critics have treated me as if I were Teddy's elephant's toenails: the slightly ridiculous relic of a no-longer valued or defensible era. Yet I know, too, in my less bleak moments, that the humanities have shown a tremendous capacity to regenerate themselves in new forms and to resist this hostile

political climate. There are many positive omens out there, as well as fine things lost. I also hope that my nostalgia can, like that of my parents, be turned to constructive ends. So I guess, as I leave the post of President of the Academy, I am issuing a nostalgic call-to-arms. Let us acknowledge and channel our yearning for the glory days of the humanities into creative action, and let us fight for a future that may enable us to leave our children something to be nostalgic about.

Endnotes

- 1 Robert A. Tarlton to [Sophie Tarlton?], 21 April 1895, private family possession; 'Robert A. Tarlton', *Adelaide Advertiser*, 8 February 1919, p. 1; David McCalman, *A Full Life and its Memories, 1916–65: Part One: Home is Africa*, unpublished memoir, Melbourne, 2003, pp. 5–6.
- 2 Brian Herne, *White Hunters. The Golden Age of African Safaris*, Henry Holt, New York, 1999, pp. 60–1.
- 3 Herne, *White Hunters*, pp. 61–2.
- 4 Cited in Herne, *White Hunters*, p. 61; see also, Bartle Bull, *Safari. A Chronicle of Adventure*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1992, p. 172.
- 5 Bull, *Safari*, p. 172.
- 6 Herne, *White Hunters*, p. 6.
- 7 Theodore Roosevelt, *African Game Trails*, St Martins Press, New York, 1988 [1910], pp. 9, 38, 40, 49.
- 8 Cited in Herne, *White Hunters*, p. 188.
- 9 The term is discussed, though not specifically in connection with Kenya, in David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1985, p. 22.
- 10 Evelyn Waugh, *Remote People*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1985, esp. pp. 135–63; Evelyn Waugh, *A Tourist in Africa*, Mandarin, London, 1989, pp. 36–57.
- 11 McCalman, *A Full Life*, p. 7.
- 12 Karen Blixen, *Out of Africa*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1954; Isak Dinesen [Karen Blixen], *Letters from Africa, 1914–31*, edited by Frans Larson, translated by Anne Born, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1981.
- 13 Herne, *White Hunters*, p. 39.
- 14 McCalman, *A Full Life*, p. 18.
- 15 Roosevelt, *African Game Trails*, p. 337.
- 16 Herne, *White Hunters*, pp. 11–46.
- 17 McCalman, *A Full Life*, p. 13.
- 18 Herne, *White Hunters*, p. 22.
- 19 Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization. A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880–1917*, University of Chicago, Chicago and London, 1996, pp. 170–215. I am indebted to Professor Marilyn Lake for alerting me to this reference.
- 20 Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory. The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture*, Knopf, New York, 1991, pp. 275–7.
- 21 Paul Russell Cutright, *Theodore Roosevelt, The Naturalist*, Harpers, New York, 1956, pp. 98–179.
- 22 Bull, *Safari*, p. 164.
- 23 Roosevelt, *African Game Trails*, p. 38; Bull, *Safari*, pp. 164–5.
- 24 Bull, *Safari*, pp. 166–9.
- 25 Roosevelt, *African Game Trails*, p. 384.
- 26 Roosevelt, *African Game Trails*, chapter one, passim.
- 27 Roosevelt, *African Game Trails*, pp. 38–42, 47–9.
- 28 Roosevelt, *African Game Trails*, p. 457; Herne, *White Hunters*, p. 67; on the ethos of

- the Lado enclave, see John Boyes, *King of the Wa-Kikyu. A True Story of Travel and Adventure in Africa, written by himself*, Methuen, London, 1912. It is dedicated to his friend William Northrop Macmillan.
- 29 Roosevelt, *African Game Trails*, pp. 381–2; Bull, *Safari*, pp. 130–6.
- 30 Roosevelt, *African Game Trails*, esp. pp. 194–223, 381–3; Bull, *Safari*, pp. 172–3.
- 31 Roosevelt, *African Game Trails*, p. 119.
- 32 Roosevelt, *African Game Trails*, pp. 464–503; Bull, *Safari*, p. 179.
- 33 Herne, *White Hunters*, pp. 104–8.
- 34 Leslie Tarlton to Theodore Roosevelt, 5 July 1910; Theodore Roosevelt to Leslie Tarlton, 18 July 1910 (letters in family possession).
- 35 Bull, *Safari*, p. 163.
- 36 Arthur Conan Doyle, *Our African Winter*, Duckworth, London, 1999, pp. 212–14.
- 37 McCalman, *A Full Life*, pp. 17–23.
- 38 George Orwell, ‘Shooting an Elephant’, in *Inside the Whale and Other Essays*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1962, pp. 91–9.
- 39 Robin Wallace-Crabbe, *A Man’s Childhood*, Imprint, Sydney, 1997, pp. 85–90.
- 40 McCalman, *A Full Life*, pp. 33–8.
- 41 T. C. Bridges and H. Hessel Tiltman, *Heroes of Modern Adventure*, Harrap, London, Bombay, Sydney, 1927; Cherry Kearton, *Photographing Wild Life Across the World*, Arrowsmith, London, no date. The book is dedicated to Kearton’s ‘dear friend’ Theodore Roosevelt.
- 42 McCalman, *A Full Life*, p. 21.
- 43 McCalman, *A Full Life*, p. 43.
- 44 Herne, *White Hunters*, pp. 180–93.
- 45 McCalman, *A Full Life*, pp. 54–86.
- 46 Laurens Van Der Post, *Venture into the Interior*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1957.
- 47 McCalman, *A Full Life*, p. 90.
- 48 Jean Starobinski, ‘The Idea of Nostalgia’, *Diogenes* vol. 54, 1966, pp. 81–103.
- 49 George Rosen, ‘Nostalgia: A “Forgotten” Psychological Disorder’, *Clio Medica*, vol. 10, 1975, pp. 28–51.
- 50 Lowenthal, *The Past*, pp. 7–8; Fred Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday. A Sociology of Nostalgia*, Free Press, New York and London, 1979, pp. 14–39; Svetland Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, New York, 2001, pp. xiii–xv. I am indebted to Professor Marilyn Lake for this last reference.
- 51 Lowenthal, *The Past*, pp. 8–10.
- 52 Davis, *Yearning*, pp. 49–69; Willis H. McCann, ‘Nostalgia: A Descriptive and Comparative Study’, *The Journal of Genetic Psychology*, vol. 62, 1943, pp. 97–104.
- 53 Boym, *Future of Nostalgia*, pp. xvi–xviii.
- 54 Davis, *Yearning*, p. 47.