The Bread from One's Mouth and the Bread from the Other's Mountain: Entangled Histories and Incessant Corrections.

It's what you would call practical reconciliation. Gulaga is an especially sacred place for Aboriginal people that is extraordinarily significant in spiritual terms. What we are able to do today is to balance the books, to restore some sense of justice following the dispossession of the last 240 years.

~Words by NSW Environment Minister Bob Debus at the handback ceremony

One woman with whom I worked closely said: "you've got to understand. I'd give my life for that mountain."

~From Deborah Bird Rose's *Reports from a Wild Country*

I. The Wild and the Quiet

We begin in the midst of history, already entangled in its strands of memory. Is there, indeed, any other place these words can begin? In her book *Reports from a Wild Country: Ethics for Decolonisation*, Deborah Bird Rose addresses the struggle of Australian society to respond to the violent burden of its colonial past. In doing so, the author speaks from the van-tage point of an anthropologist,

---

Image of Mount Gulaga downloaded from Google Earth.

a scholar originally from Delaware and educated at Brynn Mawr who has more recently spent years of her adult life in daily contact with the “Whitefellas” and “Aboriginals” of the Australian outback, specifically those inhabiting or associated with the Yarralin community of the Northern Territory's remote Victoria River Valley. In her previous book, an ethnography titled *Dingo makes us Human*, Rose has already raised troubling questions for her reading public about achieving social justice for the Yarralin people and environmental care for the land that sustains their spiritual identity and cultural legacy. In *Reports*, she means to make a yet even more emphatic case for how the path to justice might be walked for the sake of all Aboriginal peoples affected by centuries of European colonization or what comes to be named the “wild.” In doing so, Rose reflects upon no less a project than a decolonizing ethics.

What is striking in her approach is its reticence to raise overt political issues without first rethinking how we might come to be responsible to others with whom we share a history. The very first task of decolonizing, Rose suggests, has to do with how I would tell the story of a history that is shared not only with others but also with the other others, with those others who have been suppressed historically, who have failed even to appear in my response to the past of the other. Rose understands “‘decolonisation’...to mean the unmaking of the regimes of violence that promote the disconnection of moral accountability from time and place” (*RWC*, 214). And in taking up this theme, Rose turns not only to the cultural world of the Yarralin people for her inspiration but also to the thought of Emmanuel Levinas and particularly to a notion of witness derived from his thought and set forth in my work on the Shoah in *Suffering Witness*. Rose’s appropriation of Levinas’s notion of witness is focused not on the dyadic account of

myself before the *singular* other but instead emphasizes what Levinasians would term the third, my response to the other in the hearing of all the other others. For Rose, the third is characterized as "connectivity," an "entanglement" in others through which the shape of my own responsibilities and so of my subjectivity is revealed. Because of my entanglement in all the other others, an entanglement that is without limit, always renewing itself, the violence that involves colonization, appropriating the words and history and land of another as if it served nothing more than my own grasp upon the world, or the grasp of those with whom I have constituted a selective "we," is shown to always already have failed in its initial intent.

The other other's words and land and history exceed what I or we can make of them as my or our own. As a result, I find myself as already called upon to witness the other others with whom I share a land and its history, particularly if that history is one of dispossession, of colonization. This call to witnessing others in turn must be awakened not only to repressed and dispossessed memories but also to repressed and dispossessed language. Before I can even begin to talk about justice more overtly I must first talk about how I talk about justice. And in doing so, I must talk about how all the other others talk about justice. Not only history but also the language in which history is to be written must itself be rewritten. In this manner my ethical involvement in others becomes an act of what Rose terms "recuperation."

For instance, Rose's rehearing of history and so of language begins with how the word 'wild' finds an entirely new intonation of meaning in English, one provided in particular by a Yarralin interlocutor named Hobbles Danaiyarri. Hobbles remembers

how Captain Cook characterizes the Aboriginal peoples as “wild” even as Cook himself is the one who is running amok:

> Because Captain Cook order: You got to clean that people up, right up. And put all my whitefellows on top. This is my country. Good people this I bring in one day. They all ready for the Aboriginal people. He’s the wild one. No good keep this land. (*RWC*, 3).

For Hobbles the ‘wild’ does not bespeak a natural characteristic but a semantic event. The wild comes about as an invading European people inflicts this term upon Aboriginal peoples without once asking how the very invasiveness of the European presence is itself the paradigm of the wild. For Hobbles the wild names irresponsibility and oblivion. The wild involves not only being irresponsible but also being so taken with one’s irresponsibility as to not see it as irresponsible. Daly Pulkara, another voice from the Yarralin, adds to this rethinking of the wild when he contrasts ‘wild’ country—country devastated by erosion and habitat loss—with the “quiet,” a term derived from his own language and traditions (*RWC*, 4). The quiet is, in Rose’s own rendering of Pulkara’s words, a “country in which all the care of generations of people is evident to those who know how to see it” (*RWC*, 4). The quiet, in my rendering of Rose’s rendering of Pulkara’s rendering of his tradition’s rendering of this term, names gifted ground, ground received from ancestors and forebears—both human and more than human, ground which locates and inspires its human inhabitants within a sphere of entangled responsibilities to a more than human world. The wild, on the other hand, is merely “man-made and cattle-made,” a “wilderness” in which the life of the country is “falling down into gullies and washing away with the rains.” This desolation of the land, its wildness, is symptomatic

of a human oblivion to its giftedness and a cultural reduction of its animation to the working out of a narrow range of impulses and needs.

Rose's account of the wild makes clear how a spoken word becomes an avatar carrying over not only an indexical signification from the one who speaks to the one who hears but also susceptibility to a memory of a peculiar sort. Before the other even takes up the word in order to offer her or his witness to the one who hears, that word is already imbued with witness, which is to say, bearing the voices of all those who have addressed the word to yet other others. In the dyadic confrontation of Rose with Hobbles, a third, as well as a fourth and fifth, are always already present in the very words one uses. One asks the other—who is not simply an "other" but a Yarralin—what she or he sees in her or his land, and this other says "the wild." What Hobbles sees is heard in the tone in which this word has been spoken. And in the saying of this word is carried over not only Hobble's intonation of it but also that of Captain Cook and all the other others who have spoken that English word in several centuries of European occupation of the Australian subcontinent, a.k.a. the quiet countries cared for by diverse pre-European peoples.

Spoken words then are memories in a peculiar manner—emerging not as those memories referred to by Levinas at the beginning of *Totality and Infinity*, memories welling up from the interiority of the one who is singularly responsible, memories that Levinas recommends cultivating in order to resist the hegemony of a history written only by the survivors (*TI*, 56). Instead spoken words trace out *externally held* memories, linguistic morphemes still resonating in the tones of the other's address, as well as those tones of all the other others, tones that ring through each mouth that would speak each and every word, regardless of the speaker's intention. The word 'wild', in its tonality, is

'stilled', is brought into the 'quiet' by Hobble's hearing and saying of it in a manner that the European colonizers and settlers who first brought these words into the Australian landscape, the place of the Yarralin, could not have anticipated. In this alteration of its meaning, the word 'wild', wildly and bewilderingly, is nothing less than the entombment, the commemoration, the trace, of all who have spoken it to this speaking here and now. And so the word in its very speaking already undermines any intentional use of it on my part that would merely restrict it to an indexical or denotative signification. And even a connotative signification, insofar as that too bespeaks my own intentional investment in the world around me, misses the peculiar transcendence, the trace of memory resonating in the word's tonality.[1] The tonality of a word bespeaks how language itself is the connective tissue of our sociality, of our entangled responsibilities, carrying forward the impact of memories that could never been one's own, memories that nevertheless usher forth from one's mouth in one's very saying of the word to another.

And it must be made clear that Hobble's statement, his saying of the saying of the 'wild,' does not eradicate this word, does not strike it from English or the Aboriginal tongues but rather insists that its very saying is remembered as an entanglement in saying and so an entanglement in history. In this way the quiet is recuperated, even as the wild is recuperated. Both words find a renewed sense, and the Yarralin understanding of the world is neither restored nor suppressed. Instead, an Aboriginal culture finds a new and unanticipated creativity in the face of the European intent to seize and occupy its environs.

---

[1] See *SW*, pp. 123-27, where this term is first introduced by the author and developed in regard to a prophetic witnessing of the other's suffering.

II. A Logos of Incessant Correction, A Logos of Recuperation

Where then does Rose's ethics of decolonization and recuperation fit into Levinas's own account of first ethics? One might argue that from its very inception Rose's appropriation does violence to Levinas' project by mistaking his notion of the ethical asymmetry between myself and the other with that of ethical mutualism, of an entanglement in the lives of others that initiates a promiscuous investment in the world without truing it through an absolute responsibility before the singular other. Put otherwise, Rose's ethics of decolonization, it might be argued, is in danger of losing its transcendental footing. But Levinas himself might give us pause for thought in such an approach to Rose's approach to Levinas, when he, Levinas, argues in *Otherwise than Being* that the account of the ethical he would develop there "is not something that results from a project to construct the 'transcendental foundation' of 'ethical experience' (*OB*, 148) While this could be read as a condemnation of a transcendental project merely focused on ethical experience, it could also be seen to have put into question the very notion of transcendental foundation itself.[2] And as the passages following this statement in *Otherwise than Being* demonstrate, even as Levinas refuses a transcendental derivation of ethical experience, he is not adverse, as Robert Gibbs so ably argues in his *Why Ethics?*, to being taught the significance of ethics through the mouth, the saying, of the other. The significance, the meaning of my approach to the other's investment in

[2] See Eisenstadt's discussion of Levinas' discourse in *DBT*, particularly on the prophetic and scepticism, esp. pp. 99-108. Also: "But Levinas himself is not a fan of evidence. He shows his movement back by walking through it; his philosophy is fundamentally appeal, an offering up of ideas for the taking. He does not intend to impress us with the facticity of his understanding, but rather with its ethical nature. Indeed, to say, as Levinas often does that 'ethics is first philosophy' is to make an ethical statement rather than a factual or logical statement; more precisely, to say that 'ethics is first philosophy' is quite simply to perform an ethical act." (*DBT*, 6).

responsibility is revealed to be an adventure, a "what is to come," within the context of the other's sociality with all the other others. In Levinas' own words:

> Communication is an adventure of a subjectivity, different from that which is dominated by the concern to recover itself, different from that of coinciding in consciousness; it will involve uncertainty…Communication with the other can be transcendent only as a dangerous life, a fine risk to be run. (*OB*, 120)

Engaging in this adventure, one that Levinas later claims "bears [in the sense of giving birth to?] all the discourse of science and philosophy" (*OB*, 160), not only leaves room for the experientially and historically particular but demands its explicit and careful consideration. Here is given the place in Levinas' thought for "'fundamental historicity' in the sense of Merleau-Ponty" (*OB*, 160). To hear the other's witnessing of her or his ethical investment in others does not lead merely to a characterization of ethical experience but to the active instruction in how I am and we are called to become involved, intertwined (to use a word from Merleau-Ponty) in a world that is ethically deep *and* broad—a world that is articulated by both a vertical axis of the singular other's uprightness and a horizontal one of fraternal justice, mercy and compassion. In Levinas's words: "the contemporaneousness of the multiple is tied about the diachrony of the two" (*OB*, 159).

Thus, if we, yet another party to this discourse, are to bring Levinas and Rose into a conversation, then let the fine adventure we run be one of proximity and fraternity rather than of derivation and foundation. Rather than starting with how Rose might have gone wrong in her reading of Levinas, let us consider how she might have gone right and what she might have brought to Levinas' argument that Levinas himself could not

learned on his own. And in doing so, let us be reticent simply to find where in Levinas' thought, Rose's own might fit, as if the project of philosophy lies merely in finding the appropriate category within one thinker to characterize the work of another.[3] Let us *remember* how memory itself, how our sense of that which always already makes its impact upon us, reveals an a priori that is more than transcendental, even as it is more than empirical or ontological. To remember Levinas, we must do more than repeat his words or extend them intentionally into our contemporary saying of his thought. To use Rose's words, let us not restore Levinas' thought to itself, as if the memory of what Levinas has argued will be sufficient to itself in itself in order to know what it is that is argued, but let us recuperate Levinas, hearing his voice in the saying of the other's saying, the witnessing of the other that has called Rose to write about justice and history here and now in the colonial and post-colonial context of the Australian subcontinent.

If then we would bring Rose's ethics for decolonization into proximity with Levinas's thought, particularly as it is elaborated in *Otherwise than Being*, one possibility for interrogation occurs in that moment in Levinas' text when he introduces a tertiary relationship to the prior dyad of absolute obedience before the singular other. The epiphany of the other's face is now witnessed in the light of a third looking on. To the illumination of an ethical optics, in which my incessant obedience to the other is announced, is now added the secondary light of justice, in which the visibility of all the

[3] Precisely this mode of analysis, as Robert Bernasconi points out in "`Failure of Communication' as Surplus: Dialogue and Lack of Dialogue between Buber and Levinas" [*Levinas and Buber: Dialogue and Difference* , Peter Atterton, Matthew Calarco, Maurice S. Friedman, editors (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2004)], leads to reading Levinas as if he might be a philosopher of totality after all. And one must also remember that in precisely the historical situation of the Yarralin to which Rose is giving witness in her work, an entire people was categorized as "pagan" by an aggressive and hegemonic form of monotheism that reduced the cultural heritage of the Yarralin to the work of infantile minds at best and demonic ones at worst. How might then the Yarralin now give voice to this particular word ('pagan') is crucial. One cannot simply forget it, but, in bearing witness to it, one recalls or calls up the resilience, the recuperative powers, in even such a word as this. See Rose's discussion, *RWC*, 131-148.

other faces (*OB*, 158) require that I speak for them to the other before whom I am responsible, for whom I give my witness.

Levinas, at this moment of justice's emergence into logos, one characterized as a "calculus" and a "representation," speaks of "incessant correction" (*OB*, 158). In speaking to the other in the terms of the third, the search for justice inevitably engages in a betrayal that involves the "comparison of incomparables" (*OB*, 158). As a result, to speak of justice is always already to be saddled with how that very speaking might itself be an injustice. Yet to characterize justice in this manner does not lead Levinas to cynicism or despair about the possibility for justice in an earthly realm but to embracing in it a "fraternity" between speakers that "precedes the commonness of a genus" (*OB*, 159).

Let me expand here on what Levinas might be taken to be arguing. Precisely the emergence of fraternity in our speaking to one another in political discourse must become not only the framing of this discourse but also its theme. Not an anonymous discourse of impersonal or faceless principles is called for, even if such a discourse is *prima facie* capable of instituting equality before the law and a broad scope of basic human rights. In its stead, we are called to a discourse imbued with proximity, in which the inequivalence of how I might understand and live out what is being addressed to me by the other and how the other might understand and live out that "same" address, not to mention the others others nearby who are also listening on, is always at issue. Not only the derivation of equality but also its very sense is put on trial by a fraternal discourse of justice. The incessant correction Levinas speaks of then is found in Rose's words—as they emerge in her mouth and from her hand—not as some species of distributive calculus in which one

computes endlessly the just order of goods in one's society, in order to find out how members of a particular kind or genus should be treated. Rather the calculus involves the very determination or specification of who is saying what and what is meant when that particular "who" says it! Rose helps us to see that Levinas's discourse of incessant correction has to do with how the others' memories, the others' histories, the others' languages find their expression beyond my interests and beyond my intention in my own rendering of the other.[4] The traces of all other speakers in my speaking disturbs it beyond recall, renders my life as the life of others in my words. As a result, language is not so much a place of contestation with others over quantities of justice as one of hybridization and alteration before others regarding the senses of justice.[5] My words, even as they come out of my mouth, already are sounding differently than I intended them to sound, already connect me in a manner I could not have anticipated, with my neighbors.[6]

In setting out an ethics for decolonization, Rose's work can be seen as taking on the impossible responsibility of seeking justice in the light of fraternity, in spite of historical violence and its irreparable wounds, in the diverse modes of hearing one's words in the mouths of others and the words of others in one's own mouth. Euro-Australians and Yarralin are not simply two genera of humankind seeking recognition as faceless, abstract entities in the light of a law that can only put them in relationship to one

---

[4] I have argued similarly in Chapters Five and Six of *Suffering Witness*.

[5] Krzysztof Ziarek speaks of how "the order of language" is "baffled" by the trace of the other's address, so that one's words are put into question without having them torn from one's mouth, from one's spoken meaning. Thus, there is "no need for actual reweaving [of a text]…the passing [of the other through the text] is otherwise than rupturing, weaving and rerupturing." Instead "the language mesh is ruffled by the passing-by of the other." (*IL*, 96). I comment in *Suffering Witness:* "This ruffling or traumatism leaves the text over-determined, weighted with a having-been-affected that cannot be directly translated into prosaic, thematic statements. In being baffled, the text's signification is revealed in its being addressed by another" (*SW*, 126).

[6] What Ziarek characterizes as "laterality" (*IL*, 97).

another by refusing to note any but the most abstract of differences between them but as brothers in their responsibilities to one another and to all other humans. In announcing what would be characterized in Levinasian terms as a fraternity between the Yarralin and Whitefellas, Rose continually mediates, brings into comparison, at least two incomparable trajectories of address, two incomparable faces of illumination—that of her aboriginal interlocutors and that of those constituting the settlement culture, a.k.a. the colonizers, with whom the Yarralin now share their landscape, their country and their humanity. In doing so, Rose makes a remarkable move early in her text, one that might be outrageous for a mindset insisting on an impersonal discourse of faceless equals before the law, when she *remembers* that the "Whitefellas," the Euro-Australians, came to the Aboriginal lands not merely as invaders intent upon conquest but also as immigrants with hopes of finding a home. Australian culture, as our own American culture, is, then, both a settlement culture and a colonizing culture, both a culture of home-making and one of home-dispossession.

In making the very issue of colonization morally ambivalent, one might argue, Rose risks looking past horrific wrongs inflicted by European occupiers upon the Aboriginal peoples of Australia. But, in her defense, the only manner in which a colonial history can be recuperated, in which colonization can itself be decolonized, is to announce how the human face, one's other and also one's brother, already was illuminating one's settlement of the continent in a manner that one's own understanding of one's actions could have never anticipated. Put in Levinasian terms, Rose seeks expiation beyond the scope of outrage.[7] In doing so, the history between her people and

[7] See Levinas' analysis of persecution in *OB*, 111-13. Analogically to Levinas' account, it can be argued that the word that persecutes, like the face of the other who speaks it, is a slap upon one's face. And in

the Yarralin is renewed, precisely through how the other now remembers that history, in spite of the irreparable wrongs called forth by that memory. In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas asks, “Does not the memory arisen in each new instant already give to the past a new meaning? In this sense, better than clinging to the past, does it not already repair it?” (*TI*, 282). “The pardoned being is not the innocent being” (*TI*, 283) Levinas notes a bit later. This sentiment finds its expression in *Otherwise than Being* as the manner in which the very words of the other persecute me, rendering my apology, my justification of how I have lived, “disqualified,” null and void (*OB*, 121). In spite of a history of dehumanization, the opening remains for fraternity between speakers, although a fraternity fraught with ambivalence, in the uncanniness of how the other’s words, the other’s memories emerge in my own speaking and remind me (give me my mind anew!) precisely in their acknowledgment of my brotherhood that I have been pardoned, that, in spite of my culture’s genocidal impulses, the other’s address has sought me out and borne me the opportunity for making good, for seeking justice, in spite of what cannot be repaired. Put more simply in Rose’s own terms, the resilience of the other’s address remains undeterred. As a result, even if the past cannot be restored, it can be recuperated. The adventure of the Euro-Australian, then, is to bear in her or his own language the cadences and words, the practices and spiritual commitments of the very culture that was to be colonized. In this manner, the human life one attempted to destroy returns to minister to and repair one’s violence. This is the justice and this is the renewal that Rose seeks.

---

one’s undergoing of this word, this blow, one renders the very pitilessness of the persecutor’s ploy as already having inspired pity. The petrification of the word, just as the petrification of the face, cannot be sustained. A resilience in the word, that its very saying already invites further saying, disarms every effort to render the word pitiless, consumed with rage, as if it could be placed beyond expiation, beyond recuperation.

III. Case Study: The Bread from the Other's Mountain

The final chapter of Rose's study ends with an account, or really accounts, of the return of a mountain to the political control of the Yuin people of Southeastern Australia. An important moment in the discourse leading up to this recuperative gesture involved the realization on the part of the generations coming after the colonial settlers, now Australian citizens, now "Whitefellas," that the mountain they called Dromedary, named so by Captain Cook[8], was also named and better named Gulaga. Before the mountain could be returned to the Yuin, it must first have been intoned as Gulaga by those who were returning it. And this act of intonation in turn required that Whitefellas became witnesses to the ambivalent history of naming this mountain, a history whose ambivalence still persists in the current (re)naming of it as Gulaga. This re-intonation of the mountain, as it finds its way into our all too Western speaking of it, alters what the give back of the mountain signifies. Or for that matter, what a mountain and this mountain, in particular, might signify. For the mountain, from the perspective of the Yuin, was never anyone's to give in the first place! Rose amplifies:

> The mountain—Gulaga—is a Dreaming woman, and she is linked by story to her two sons Little Dromedary and Montague Island. Gulaga is a Dreaming place, a sacred site, for local Aboriginal people. It is a place to which they are uniquely connected as a consequence of creation. (*RWC*, 194)

The colonizing culture must now recognize its claim upon a mountain was heard differently in the ears of the Yuin—heard differently not because they were the ones whose property had been usurped, but more significantly because the Yuin never thought

[8] Google Earth still lists the mountain as Mount Dromedary!

of the mountain in terms of a word like "property" at all. The very first moment of the mountain's theft was in its renaming. And in that moment the mountain was reduced to an objective entity, a hump of land overlooking the ocean, which various parties could in turn strive to own. But for the Yuin the mountain was and remains an ethical entity, an entanglement in all the other others, a thicket of responsibility that only[9] now the newcomers, the Whitefellas, are finally beginning to hear in their own way.

Rose characterizes three modalities to this hearing of the mountain as an ethical entity. In the first mode, the mountain demonstrates to its human respondents that it is self-organizing in a manner that cannot be accomplished through human agency alone. A botanical garden never succeeds in its aping of a mountain's agency to produce the community of living entities that the mountain bears of its own accord. Second, the mountain is active on its own behalf. In its own way, the mountain repairs itself; it is resilient. Finally, the mountain "is an active and living presence"—it reaches out to people and changes radically the way in which they live their lives (*RWC*, 207). The mountain orients human doing by disrupting it and calling it beyond its own self interest to "reverential labour" (*RWC*, 208).

In Rose's interview of Mal Didben, a local Whitefella farming most of his life in the mountain's shadow, we hear in his own words the effect of this orientation:

> The hard knocks [drought, disease, crop failure] have sorted me out. I can see my mistakes and the good values come into my head. I can take [the lessons of the

[9] Rose turns to the work of Frederique Apffel Marglin to point out how the colonial appropriation of a human culture and its landscape is a doubled violence—first, the violence of a theft, but second, the invisible violence that "robs people of their power to be perceived as possible resources for alternatives to modernity." By submitting English speaking discourse to the depth and power by which the Yuin are addressed and inspired by Mount Gulaga, this second mode of violence is brought into the open and resisted (*RWC*, 200). This resistance is not characterized as post-modern by Rose but as "counter-modern."

> mountain] with me. I'll never lose it. And it was in the minds of the Aboriginals too. The mountain drew them back. (*RWC*, 208)

> I'm sitting on the edge of the lake where Aboriginals have lived for probably thirty or forty thousand years without cutting one single tree down—not thousands, but one single tree. And they were healthy and happy people, healthier, probably than I am now and healthier than most Europeans are who've tipped the place upside down to make a dollar of it. (*RWC*, 208)

Notice that the land, like history, becomes a text of intonations, a said that hearkens to the saying of thousands of generations of Aboriginal voices. The songlines, the stories of creation, the reverence for the mountain, are not new found things. Nor could they be enacted through a merely dyadic relationship between Mel and the mountain. The mountain speaks only when its saying is heard against the horizon of all the other voices who have lived there, in the shadow of its teachings, in the living call to responsibility for all creatures, all created beings, that the mountain announces in Yuin ears. Mel's entanglement in the mountain is inevitably an entanglement in the manifold voices of all those others who also are entangled. The mountain too is entangled in these voices. In this manner, Rose notes, the mountain is revealed to be an ethical entity, as are all entities for the Yuin (*RWC*, 166, 197). The mountain's beauty, the beauty that "startles" Mel into reverence and claims his allegiance, is yoked to the manner in which the mountain forms a holy text, a palimpsest carrying the expressive gestures and tones of the innumerable voices of the innumerable generations of a created world.

Sitting at this lakeside with Mel, Rose, in her particular hearing of Levinas's work, has extended, reinterpreted, altered[10] his notion of responsibility most radically, or to use a word she might prefer, most "provocatively."[11] Rose, thinking in the tracks of Mary Graham, an Aboriginal philosopher, and listening to the words of Whitefellas and Blackfellas alike living in the shadow of the mountain, extends the notion of the other others, of Levinasian fraternity, not only to other Aboriginal peoples and Whitefellas, not only to all the other human others but also to "water, plants, animals, indeed the whole of what we generally call the natural world" (*RWC*, 186). In doing so, she makes the claim that the mountain comes to be thought differently than speakers of English language have had the capacity heretofore to express. In doing so, she claims to be taking up Levinas' own call, in her words, "to abjure homogenization, appropriation, objectification, and manipulation" (*RWC*, 189).

A critique of Rose's approach could be offered that would claim she is not sensitive enough to Levinas' own critique of the sacred, that her account of the mountain runs the metaphysical danger of idolatry, of replacing the infinite with the finite, the transcendent with the mundane. Yet Rose notes, "People who experienced the mountain as a sacred place worked together without demanding a dogma of belief" (*RWC*, 211). Here we do not find the faceless anonymity Levinas fears in the sacred as a category of relation but a call to that fine adventure in which the faces of others temper our own hold upon our own place in the sun. The European reader is reminded that there is more than one Bible of creation, more than one face to the kerygma of the other's approach and

[10] Or perhaps, in some "stricter" readings, lost!

[11] "Divergences are also provocations, and from an ecological point of view, provocations are exactly what is needed for new knowledge to come into the world. A provocation is an unanticipated perspective. It enriches thought, conversation and discovery." (*RWC*, 177)

more than one manner of approaching a mountain.[12] If one attends to the other than monotheistic practices of the Yuin and Yarralin peoples, practices emphasizing the creatureliness of the world, of its having been created, of the necessity of finite creatures thus to care for one another in a manner that prohibits any one of them taking on the pose of divinity, of one's precedence over the other, the very notion of place and the sacred perhaps receives an intonation unheard in Levinas' thought. And this occurs in an historical context in which notions of monotheism, however mistaken, were used to subjugate alleged "heathens."

Rose's hearing of Levinas's philosophical text reveals how it too must be read in light of its own involvement in history, in which the very intonation of its language was always already irrevocably in debt to and admirably attendant upon previous generations and at the same time unknowing at best and indifferent at worst to their full breadth or wisdom. Levinas himself is careful to argue, as noted above, that philosophy, like all other discourses born in the tertiary hearing of all the other others, must be a discourse of "incessant correction" (*OB*¸ 158), in which the betrayal inherent in thematization of the other's voice, the other's saying, must be repeatedly undone (*OB*, 162). If this is so, the reader of Levinas from the start has been called upon to raise the issue of how Levinas's own words, in the various moments of his own derivation of the other's uprightness and his subjection to it, are limited and also informed by their fundamental historicity.

For example, in a crucial passage in *Otherwise than Being*, Levinas speaks, in reference to his own religious tradition, of one's proffering the bread from one's own

[12] Or, alternatively, that the tonality of my saying (or, here, my writing) of 'Bible' undergoes a shift, an incessant correction, as its annunciation finds multiple resonances in the annunciation by the other others of "Sutra," "Koran," "Dreaming"…. Can the Torah ever simply be the same book, once it is read anew, by the following generation? And similarly, can it ever be closed in the same way, once it is brought into the Dreamlines of the Yarralin?

mouth for the sake of the other. In doing so, Levinas makes much of the bread's materiality in this gesture, of how one's biting the bread, "earned" in the "sweat of [one's] brow" (*OB*, 191 n.7), is an enjoyment in which the bread's very volume becomes one's own volume, one's own spatiality, in which one's appetite satisfies itself in its swallowing the world as its own. This account of eating is pronouncedly secular and anti-sacral. And yet it is paradoxically the necessary condition for the institution of the ethical, since giving to the other can only occur if the other has needs which need taking of. And that giving can only be a "tearing from oneself," a rupturing of one's egoism, if eating as a mode of enjoyment affirms egoism, sustains complacency. As Levinas trenchantly puts it: "Only a subject that eats can be for-the-other, or can signify. Signification, the-one-for-the-other, has meaning only among beings of flesh and blood" (*OB*, 74).

In this Levinasian exemplar of the genesis of responsibility, of the-one-for-the-other, one important aspect of the materiality of the bread, namely, its genesis, or birth, from within an earthly realm, is left unsaid. Not only is bread gathered by the sweat of a human brow but also it is born into existence by the fecundity of seeds and the growth of plants and yeast spores. And not only human entities hunger for those seeds, or for that bread. The Hebrew Tanach is actually more attentive to such distinctions than is Levinas's own text. For example, in Psalm 104:18, the mountain heights are celebrated as having been created not for humans but as the lair of mountain goats.[13] And in the book of Job, no less an authority than the Most High speaks of how the eagle [also

[13] In Midrash Tehillim [*The Midrash on the Psalms*, William Braude, editor and translator (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959], the following is argued: "R. Yudan went on to say; If you marvel that G-d should have created His heaven and His earth for Abraham, note that it is written *The High Mountains are for the wild goats*. Now, if the high mountains were created solely for the wild-goats, surely it can be maintained that the world was created solely because of the merit of Abraham." 104: 15 (p. 173).

translated vulture] gathers up bloody gibbets of meat to bring them to its offspring (Job:26-30).[14] Food is not only about the assumption of a volume into my own mouth to become part of my own volume. It is also about the manner in which other living entities provide from their very flesh for that volume. One needs, in one's grace, to be thankful to more than G-d or even those fellow humans whose brows have sweated to put food upon one's table.

Mel's observations above about his relationship to Gulaga mirror the Yuin awareness of the mountain as having already offered to oneself the food one eats. And when this offering is fully sensed, fully made palpable in one's own flesh, one finds Levinas's metaphor of the bread from one's mouth complicated. For before the bread could have been placed in one's mouth, it was necessary to have harvested it from wheat kernels growing from out of the earth, wheat that also was offered, as a widely cited parable of Jesus suggests, as edible seeds for the birds of the fields. And the birds in eating these seeds, whatever stray ones might have fallen their way, in turn offered their own lives to feed yet others among the vast array of entities giving flesh to creation and so as well to the flanks of this particular mountain named Gulaga.

Perhaps, Levinas is right in insisting on desacralizing food, on putting it on a sure human footing, in order to argue more assuredly for an notion of ethics that does not succumb to idolatry, that insists on the virtues of monotheism, of a radical and unrelenting suspicion regarding the subsuming of the ethical under the anonymous forces at play or war within the *il y a*, the wastelands of being lying all about the human face

[14] See Job, 39: 27-30 (JPS Translation, 1917):
Doth the vulture mount up at thy command, and make her nest on high?
She dwelleth and abideth on the rock, upon the crag of the rock, and the stronghold.
From thence she spieth out the prey; her eyes behold it afar off.
Her young ones also suck up blood; and where the slain are, there is she.

that approaches me in its uprightness. Levinas would affirm not "Deucalion," who "casts stones" behind him from which an army of men arises as ants, but "monotheism," which he understands as "human kinship, this idea of a human race that refers back to the approach of the Other in the face, in a dimension of height, in responsibility for oneself and the Other" (*OB*, 214).

But of whose 'sacred' and whose 'monotheism' are we then speaking? And what are we to think of the mountain named Gulaga who is a Dreaming woman? Is this particular naming one that "lets the word God be pronounced without letting divinity be said" (*OB*, 162)? Need taking the Yuin seriously in their cultural and spiritual commitments to a mountain necessarily be an invitation to idolatry, particularly if the very significance of her, the mountain's, body is to entangle all living entities into relationships that make responsibility the very articulation of the real? Might this magnification of the ethical significance of what we Westerners term the "natural" world be a significant voice, as Rose hopes, for counter-modernity, for a critique of those human forces Levinas sees as working themselves out in anonymous laws as part of a impersonal totality? I am not competent to make the judgments that would lead to any good answers to these questions, particularly without reference to Yuin interlocutors. But, perhaps, if instead of merely going to the wild places recommended by the Hebrew Bible, the wastelands, the deserts, I also went into the "quiet" recommended by Daly Pulkara, I might gain a new fluency in my hearing of the ethical there in the still, small bleating of a more than human world all about me. Thanks to Rose's efforts, I can at least begin to have a suspicion that the articulation of words in Levinas's text, words as abstract as 'monotheism' and as concrete as 'mountain' and 'bread' might be more

historically determined than I had heretofore realized.[15] I have also been made aware of how my saying of these words gains new tonalities, as I hear emerging from within them in my very mouth, the voices of the Yarralin and the Yuin, as well as the voice of Deborah Bird Rose.

And so I can only end this essay by another beginning. And in doing so, to remember that for Levinas philosophy rightly begins and ends in ambivalence, in enigma, as it "is called upon to conceive ambivalence, to conceive it in several times" (*OB*, 162).

Bibliography

DBT Oona Ajzenstat (Eisenstadt), *Driven Back to the Text: The Premodern Sources of Levinas's Postmodernism* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2001).

DMH Deborah Bird Rose, *Dingo Makes Us Human* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

IL Krzysztof, Ziarek. *Inflected Language: Toward a Hermeneutics of Nearness: Heidegger, Levinas, Stevens, Celan* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994).

OB Levinas, Emmanuel. *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1999).

RWC Rose, Deborah Bird. *Reports from a Wild Country: ethics for decolonisation* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2004).

SW Hatley, James. *Suffering Witness: The Quandary of Responsibility after the Irreparable* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2000).

[15] Yet other possibilities for questioning the senses of Levinas's vocabulary are offered in Rose's analysis of the Yarralin and Yuin worldviews, particularly in their sense of orientation in time (*RWC*, 151-55). For these peoples time is pictured as flowing toward the past rather than toward the future. What might such a notion mean for Levinasian diachrony and the messianic hope implicit in it?

TI Levinas, Emmanuel. *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1999).

WE Robert Gibbs, *Why Ethics?: Signs of Responsibility* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).