

## A CRITICAL REVIEW

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**Michael Hyde, *All Along the Watchtower – Memoir of a Sixties Revolutionary*, The Vulgar Press, Melbourne, 2010. pp. 274. \$32.95 paper.**

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### INTRODUCTION

*All Along the Watchtower* is an autobiographical memoir covering four years in the life of ‘sixties revolutionary’ Mike Hyde. The story begins early in 1967 with Hyde’s arrival at Melbourne’s Monash University after a period studying in California, and traces a roughly chronological path to 1971.

Michael Hyde is to be congratulated for writing this memoir. He is one of very few former ‘sixties’ activists who have done so. I set out to write a history of the ‘sixties’ a considerable time ago. I have pored over thousands of documents and conducted over one hundred (oral history) interviews. My labours continue and I have yet to complete this project. Hyde has completed his story and he deserves enormous credit.

I have responded to his book as an historian. I am not a literary critic or an expert on memoirs. Memoirs are not the same as histories, but they are a form of non-fictional historical writing. A memoir is the author’s perspective and memories of events. It is perfectly permissible for a memoir to be heavy on perspective and not balanced or multi-perspective as might be expected from an historical study. But a memoir is not a novel. A novel masquerading as a memoir would raise some serious issues. Memoirs and histories share many of the same rules of engagement, particularly the strict injunction to not make up historical facts. Precisely because so little has been written about the ‘sixties’ from the perspective of those who were involved in the Australian left, it is important to be as historically accurate as possible. It is this position that underpins the critique that follows.

*All Along the Watchtower* is a good read. The author is an experienced craftsman who has captured the authentic spirit of the times and taken the reader to the heart of what it felt like to be involved in the heady days of student and youth revolt.<sup>1</sup>

His accounts of some major events – for instance the Moratorium, the violent July 4 demonstrations, and the Monash struggles – benefit from his eagle eye for detail. His writing style is fast-paced: his own life kept ‘rocketing by’ and so does the action of the memoir. The author is unapologetic but not unreflective. He proudly exalts in his own achievements and those of his Maoist contemporaries. There is no self-censorship either. The author appears to have held back nothing. He is sometimes embarrassingly honest about his own doubts, failings and weaknesses.

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A brief outline of its chapters and contents might help to convey the flavour and structure of the book.

The book’s first two parts deal with 1967, although cavalier treatment of the chronological means that later events (for example the ‘Mock Crucifixion’ of 1968 and the Draft Resisters Union of 1970) intrude prematurely on the narrative. The year begins with protests against the hanging of Ronald Ryan. Hyde joins the Monash University Labor Club as it takes a decisive turn to the left - action to prevent the University honouring Victorian Premier Henry Bolte is followed by a provocative campaign, in which Hyde becomes a central figure, to collect money for the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam. Involving himself in the anti-conscription campaign, Hyde burns his registration card. In the radical household at 7 Jasmine Street (Caulfield) he loses his virginity.

Parts 3-6 are taken up mainly with 1968, although chronologically misplaced events again intrude. Hyde and ‘Bill’ travel to China with a student group and then slip away to Phnom Penh to hand over a \$500 donation to the NLF. They witness the Tet Offensive and meet Wilfred Burchett. Student militancy over Vietnam explodes in a violent July 4 demonstration outside the US Consulate. Hyde joins the Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist) and begins a serious relationship with ‘Tess’.

Part 7 (1969) opens with Hyde teaching at Oakleigh High School. ‘The Worker-Student Alliance’ establishes an off-campus radical centre in Greville Street Prahran - the Bakery – and Hyde moves in. He meets Ted Hill, Chairman of the CPA (M-L). Students march beside workers to defend Clarrie O’Shea of the Tramways Union. July 4 is again violent. Hyde experiences headaches and panic attacks, moves out of the Bakery, is dumped by ‘Tess’, and has a gun pointed at him.

Parts 8-9 cover 1970. It is the year of the first Moratorium. Honeywell is raided, and the (Monash) Careers and Appointments Office is occupied. Hyde is expelled for ‘life’ from

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<sup>1</sup> Only occasionally could I find an obvious literary mistake. As an example - the strange phrase ‘one cold autumn in 1969’ ( p. 198 ).

Monash, and sacked by the Education Department. At Monash, classes are boycotted and the Administration building occupied. The Worker-Student Alliance now has branches 'everywhere'. Hyde graduates.

Part Ten brings the narrative to a close in 1971. The May Day rally of that year turns into a riot. The author concludes his memoir with a brief assessment of the past - he asks 'was it all worth it?' and answers in the affirmative. He points to the stories still waiting to be told.

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The great majority of individuals mentioned in *All Along the Watchtower* have been given pseudonyms. It is quite unclear why this has been done. Possibly, it is for the purpose of protecting the identity and privacy of those who wish, for whatever reason, to dissociate themselves from their past left political activity or sexual adventures. The book does, after all, explore some 'extreme' political activity and some very personal terrain. Nevertheless, forty years have passed since 1971 and it is hard to believe ASIO has maintained its interest in 'sixties' revolutionaries. Also, most former 'sixties' activists seem to quite happily identify with their past commitments.

The use of pseudonyms allows the author to conceal identities. But it also, intentionally or not intentionally, conceals the shifts from fact to fiction and back that appear to occur throughout the book. One suspects that there is some literary reasoning behind this strange use of so many pseudonyms in a memoir.

It is not certain that every person mentioned in the book is, wholly or partly, a real historical figure, but it is likely that most are. With a few odd exceptions, only first (given) names are used. According to my own historical detective work, there are eight categories of names:

1. Definitely real people who are given their real full name: Ted Hill, Jim Cairns, Sir Douglas Menzies, Michael Hyde.
2. Definitely real people who are given a pseudonym: Lewis (Monash Vice-Chancellor Louis Matheson).
3. Recognisable real people given pseudonyms:  
Matt - Albert Langer; Amy - Martha Campbell; Jill - Kerry Miller; Les - Darce Cassidy; Sunny - Gayle Williams; Norman - (a recognisable 'sixties' activist); Joe - Bill Genery; Rick - Ron Lawson; Tess (also Tessa) - Carey Prescott; Vince - Dave Rubin; Kurt - Karl Armstrong.
4. Probable composite characters: Paul - Dave Nadel et al? ; Bill - Peter Price et al?.
5. Unidentified (probably real) people given pseudonyms:  
Susie, Cassie, Geoff, Naomi, Ruby, Harry, Jenny, Robbie, Peter, Martha, Jim (Keith Jepson?), baby Che (Che Jepson?), Bernard (John Sinnott?).
6. Unidentified (maybe real) people given (probable) full-name pseudonyms:  
Brian Hamilton; Sam Delmastro.

7. Recognisable real person without a name or a pseudonym: 'Trotskyist Physics lecturer at Jasmine Street' - Alan Roberts.

8. Recognisable real people given their own real first name: Ken - Ken Mansell; Jan - Jan Armstrong; Lou - Lou Costello.

*All Along the Watchtower* is narrated in the past tense, and in the first-person. The 'voice' of the first-person narrator is the Mike Hyde of the sixties, not the present day Michael Hyde. The memoir resembles a novel in more than one respect, and probably many readers will believe they are reading a novel. The narrative is essentially chronological, though discontinuous, and the author, drawing on his experience as a fiction writer, frequently resorts to novelistic plot structures built on reconstructed dialogue and conversations. That is not necessarily a problem if they are factually based and many memoirists have done this.

Unlike the narrator of a classical realist novel, the narrator here is not omniscient and cannot read other people's minds. For the most part he deals only with things he personally experienced or felt. There are few pen portraits other than the portrait of the author himself. The characters appear and disappear fleetingly. They only matter in so far as they relate to the author and his experiences. The gaze of the author, and the reader, is necessarily always upon Hyde. The author's irritating and repetitious use of the royal 'we' might suggest otherwise. However, the apparently unifying literary device of 'we' creates an almost narcissistic narrative because through it the 'I' presumes to speak for 'others'. ('We were tailed wherever we went', he writes. Who is 'we'?) Nevertheless, in a memoir this is not a serious criticism in and of itself, even if some of the subject matter is hardly of historical significance, and much that was significant is missed. Noticeably absent from Hyde's account are the contemporary eruptions of anti-war and student rebellion in other states.

As Humphrey McQueen points out on the back cover, the book is about what the sixties were like, not what they meant. There is little analysis of the times and only minimal reflection. The book begins with a brief description of the author's 'free and wild' sojourn in California up to the end of 1966. He touches on Berkeley but provides no explanation for the rise of the American New Left. The decision to slice the 1967-71 period from a somewhat longer story of 'sixties' radicalism was surely an arbitrary one. When he writes that 'the social and political upheaval of the sixties in Australia began in 1967', this is questionable. Certainly this is when it began for Mike Hyde. Some, myself included, would say it began earlier. Also, because the story winds down in 1970-71, the author is spared the painful and difficult task of describing and explaining the seventies retreat of the Australian left in general and the Maoist left in particular. The closing section of the book whets the appetite but does not satisfy it. None of the questions which are asked (Was it all worth it? Did my generation bring about enough changes?) are seriously answered.

If there is little reflection and analysis, this is because the 'voice' is contemporary rather than retrospective, belonging to Michael Hyde of the 'sixties'. Michael Hyde of the 'sixties' was, in any case, more inclined towards militant activism than theorising. The

most positive and welcome aspect of this approach is that Hyde is almost totally unapologetic – nowhere does he recant on, or betray, his revolutionary attitude of forty years ago. His book captures and celebrates the moment. He laments the ridicule of the ‘sixties’ and points to ‘thousands of stories out there, waiting to be told’. Given it is so fashionable nowadays to can the ‘sixties’, the near absence of shame or qualification in ‘All Along the Watchtower’ is refreshing.

The author would undoubtedly now question some of the ideological views mentioned in the book, and cringe at the view of women as sex objects. When Hyde, initially uncritical in support of the Chinese Cultural Revolution, develops qualms about its excesses, we wonder if the doubt expresses a retrospective present-day ‘voice’. There is a definite change of ‘voice’ on page 198 when Hyde suggests ‘it would have been more helpful if we’d been more open’.

The book is strikingly free of sectarianism, or, more correctly, references to sectarianism. Some of those involved in the ‘sixties’ revolutionary left were sectarian towards other left wing groups and tendencies, often ferociously so. Even without sectarianism, there was political and ideological conflict. The Maoist (‘Marxist-Leninist’) movement in Melbourne reached a height of influence through bitter ideological conflict with the ‘revisionist’ Communist Party, the Monash New Left Club, and the ‘Trots’. There is barely a hint of this conflict in Michael Hyde’s book. His fire is mainly directed at the class enemy – the university administration, the government and police, and the warmongers.

Hyde appears to have removed from the story of the left anyone or anything that might possibly be the subject of strain or conflict.<sup>2</sup> One example from the Greville Street/Bakery story will suffice to illustrate. Jill Jolliffe, a radical Monash student, and her partner Ron Lawson (‘Rick’) established Alice’s Restaurant Bookshop in Greville Street Prahran in late 1968. This soon led to the Monash Labor Club’s occupation of the Bakery two doors up the street. Jolliffe and Hyde were at this time on good terms. In late 1969 Jolliffe converted to Trotskyism and became the enemy. Lawson stayed in the Bakery orbit. Jolliffe played a key role in early-1969 protests against Billy Graham. Hyde’s slant on this is very interesting. He highlights the role of Lawson (‘Rick’) at the protests and completely ignores Jolliffe. He describes ‘Rick’ as a bookseller. Lawson, in fact, though he certainly helped manage the shop, worked full-time as a storeman at Table Talk Biscuits in Prahran. Jolliffe was the bookseller, permanently stationed at the shop. She is not only removed from the Billy Graham protests, she is removed from Greville Street, the Bookshop, and the text as a whole. (Having said all that, it must be pointed out she is pictured in the photo on the front cover).

This brushing away of internecine sixties warfare is quite ambiguous. Is it an expression of a contemporary ‘sixties’ Hyde ‘voice’ despatching unmentionable enemies to the dustbin of history, or is it rather the expression of the Michael Hyde of 2010, somewhat less concerned with, and motivated by, the internecine warfare of his own political past?

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<sup>2</sup> Hyde’s repetitive use of ‘we’, mentioned above, has the effect of conveying a more united left than was historically the case.

To ignore the shades and diversity of opinion within the left (Monash and elsewhere), is to present an unrealistic and romanticised picture.

## FACT AND FICTION

There are a large number of factual inaccuracies in the text, and major errors resulting from the author's disregard for historical sequence.

By far the greater part of what takes place in the book is made up of accounts of real historical events. Hyde describes, in a more or less accurate fashion - that is, for the most part, without invention or embellishment - the historic and dramatic events of the period. His description of the student struggle against the Monash administration over discipline issues is an authentic historical account - albeit in a novelistic style - and the same can be said of his accounts of the two violent July 4 demonstrations outside the U.S Consulate in Melbourne (1968, 1969) and his account of the first Moratorium in Melbourne (May 8, 1970).

However, the problem is that many readers really might wonder how much of Hyde's memoir has been invented or exaggerated. The photo on the front cover, showing a group (which includes Hyde, Jolliffe, Lawson, Jim Marchment and Hyde's friend Nigel) standing in the ruins of a demolished building and carrying guns, was a posed and hardly spontaneous shot. Whether or not it has been placed on the cover of the book as an ironic comment I am not in a position to judge, but in a sense the photo symbolises and announces the inauthentic qualities that spoil this book. The revolutionaries of the 'sixties', despite what the publisher may have wanted to convey, did not carry guns. Not in Melbourne, at any rate.

There are some facts that have surely been invented. Bad memory or sloppy research could not possibly account for his story about having lived at the Bakery in the first months of 1969. Those who did really live at the Bakery ( including myself ) cannot remember him having ever done so. Similarly, he writes about a co-ordinated campaign for university students and unionists to hand out leaflets at the front gates of secondary schools, encouraging the students to attend the July 4 demonstration. Such a campaign did not happen.

The author's description of the 1968 July 4 demonstration has one curious element. He says there was a plan to get the (U.S) flag down and that 'the cops said that he (Vince) had a knife to cut down the flag and that he'd slashed a policeman's hand'. The character 'Vince' is no doubt based on the historical Dave Rubin, a wharfie who was charged with maliciously wounding a police officer at this July 4 demonstration. Rubin and Albert Langer were both charged with rioting and their trials were conducted the following year. Hyde describes the situation in the South Melbourne lock-up where he and 'Vince' are being processed. He writes 'They then planted a knife on Vince and slashed his jacket pocket' (page 134). Is this true, or has it been made up for the sake of a good story? In an earlier book (his novel *Hey Joe* ), Hyde mentions the accusation made by police that a cop had got his hand slashed by a knife-wielding demonstrator, but does not mention

them planting a knife.<sup>3</sup> However, if this is a literary invention, it is a minor but curious point. More important is the absence from the memoir of any mention of the extraordinary Rubin-Langer trials, in the face of which a broad left defence front was formed, and during which both 'Vince' and 'Matt' excelled themselves.

There are episodes depicted in the memoir where we should not take the author at his word as they truly stretch the bounds of credibility. At the height of the Monash Labor Club's 'Aid to the NLF' campaign in 1967, Hyde is pulled over on the Nepean Highway near Mordialloc by plainclothes police who surreptitiously tamper with his brakes. In 1968 he goes roaring around on a paste-up with the driver's baby in a bassinette on the back seat. In July 1969 someone points a gun at him through his bedroom window. He also writes about a network of tunnels under the Monash campus.

Other incidents described by the author do scrape within the bounds of credibility but are almost certainly embellished, as the author flirts on the boundary of fiction. The graduation ceremony where Hyde is finally awarded his degree by a hostile Sir Douglas Menzies is made to order for such treatment. Hyde also describes, in gruesome detail, his own participation in a nocturnal experiment on a milkman's horse aimed at ascertaining whether the same methods could be applied to police horses. The horse is put to sleep with a syringe and a vial of liquid supplied by a vet. For the customs check on return from Cambodia, Hyde inserts the NLF receipt into his own arse. In Sydney, an English honours student performs oral sex on himself. It comes as a surprise, given the Maoist leaders of the Monash Labor Club were justifiably cautious about drug use, to read about Hyde's own acid (LSD) trip. The group sex episode (p. 126) is also a surprise, given the extent of puritanical attitudes on the left.

Even without embellishment, there is exaggeration. Hyde's description of the 1969 July 4 demonstration for instance provides a catalogue of busted teeth, black eyes, bruised ribs. Bakery people, he says, were black and blue. His own nose, he says, was out of shape. On page nineteen he titillates the reader with 'what lay in store – a beating, interrogation, guns at your head'.

The amount of attention that anti-conscription receives in the book is very odd given that the Monash Labor Club (and later the Worker-Student Alliance) in practice attached relatively little importance to it at the time.<sup>4</sup> His own participation in anti-conscription activity is one of the author's main themes. In 1967, after informing the Department of Labor (sic) and National Service, Hyde (joined by Geoff and Bill) burns his draft card in Collins Street. He laments the drafting of one close friend Brian Hamilton and personally helps another, Sam Delmastro, to disappear underground. Girlfriend Tess and he help a draft objector escape from Oakleigh Court.

The problem is that it is not possible for readers to judge exactly how much is fiction and how much is 'fact' because the memoir is taken up with non-historic incidents that are

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<sup>3</sup> Michael Hyde, *Hey Joe*, The Vulgar Press, 2003, p. 14.

<sup>4</sup> At one point, WSA, with class struggle agitation in mind, actually encouraged at least one of its members to join the Army.

impossible to verify. For example, Hyde describes housemates travelling north to see friends who have dropped out. He visits Peter and Martha, hippies in the Otways. Similarly with the intimately personal: one has to accept the author's word when he recounts his own sexual and psychological experiences. In mid-1969, Hyde is dumped by his girlfriend Tess. This episode is well written. His bitterness and hurt are palpable. We just do not know whether it is true. In his 'Prologue', Hyde tells of almost drowning as a five-year-old in 1951, and we wonder if he is suggesting this as the source of his later problem with panic attacks and night sweats. More importantly, did this really happen?

## CHRONOLOGY

The book is chronologically confusing. So many of the historical events described by the author are chronologically disordered. It is impossible to get a sense of how the various student and radical movements of the time developed because his chronology is so inaccurate. In the author's hands, key moments are misplaced by years. Unlike the innocent or unwary reader, those with knowledge of the period, or those who were there and can remember it, will recognise just how inaccurate he has been.

Take, for example, the anti-conscription movement. Much of the post-1968 anti-draft activism depicted is falsely telescoped to 1967-68, effectively greatly exaggerating the level of militancy of this earlier period. It is nonsense to say that thousands were refusing to register and burning their registration papers (or living in Albania!) in May 1968, and that civil disobedience was happening in the suburbs and shopping centres in 1968. Hyde has the 'Don't Register' campaign, which historically began in 1968, coinciding with events that took place in 1967. He describes himself reading Draft Resisters Union advice for conscientious objectors near the end of 1967, and has the DRU organising a 'Fill in a Falsie' campaign in 1968. The DRU was not formed until June 1970. He has his father arrested at the GPO for handing out leaflets urging young men not to register (thus breaking Council by-law 418) in May 1968 when this historically occurred in early 1969. Again mistakenly, he has Michael Hamel-Green going underground in 1968.

Perhaps the worst example is his positioning of 'draft resister Kurt and wife Jan'. 'Kurt' is transparently Karl Armstrong and 'Jan' is Jan Armstrong. As Karl himself describes in the book *A Decade of Dissent*, he and Jan escaped to China. Karl evaded the Commonwealth Police by arranging for himself and Jan to leave at different airports – Perth and Darwin.<sup>5</sup> Hyde has them both escaping through Perth, with the police waiting at Darwin. For whatever reason, sloppy research or extreme literary licence, Hyde has them escaping (and linking up with his own student tour group in China) in January 1968. The Armstrongs' actual escape occurred in 1971. How odd then that Kurt was 'last seen at a Jasmine Street party'. Albania-bound Kurt/Karl appears in history three years too early – 1968 instead of 1971. The author has, of course, conflated (knowingly or not) the 1968 and 1971 trips to China. Such treatment transforms the historical Karl Armstrong who, in 1968, was still a member of the 'revisionist' Young Socialist League (formerly Eureka Youth League) and not yet particularly sympathetic to the Monash Labor Club or Maoism.

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<sup>5</sup> See Greg Langley, *A Decade of Dissent*, Allen and Unwin, 1992, p. 195.



The author's treatment of the Bakery in Greville Street Prahran, and the Worker-Student Alliance organization, is also a-historical. He describes spending his vacation at Camp Eureka, at a 'radical conference of University Labor (sic) clubs and other like minds'. He does not indicate which vacation, but the context defines this as the Christmas-New Year period of 1968-69. This conference, he says, set up a new organization, the Worker-Student Alliance. In fact the Worker-Student Alliance was not formed until twelve months later, at Camp Eureka in the new year of 1970. Nor were University Labour clubs represented at Camp Eureka.

Hyde says he was assigned to search for a building to rent for WSA, and found an old two-storey building in Greville Street Prahran, formerly a bakery. He was no doubt assigned to find a building, but not for WSA. The Bakery was established in early 1969 as an off-campus headquarters for the Monash Labor Club and for non-student revolutionaries. The organization which, along with the Labor Club, found the Bakery in Greville Street, and which paid the rent throughout that first year, was not WSA but the Revolutionary Socialist Alliance (RSA or 'Rev Socs'). This organisation was set up to accommodate workers and other non-Monash radicals. Having made such a fundamental historical error about WSA and RSA, almost everything written about the Bakery needs correction or qualification.

Hyde writes that the WSA was set up in early 1969 to be a point of contact for Peoples Theatre, Students in Dissent and the Socialist Teachers Association. He has WSA 'taking off' ('with branches from Carlton to Boronia') in 1969. This of course all happened at least twelve months later. The aforementioned groups (PT, SID and STA) did not exist in early 1969. He describes the 1969 Bakery meetings and 1969 Bakery Friday night parties as WSA events. Actually, they were run by the RSA and the Monash Labor Club. He writes the Worker-Student Alliance branches were everywhere in mid-1970. Actually, this burgeoning did not happen until 1971. He claims a number of secondary-school student 'undergrounds' emerged with the advent of the Bakery. This is misleading. Many had in fact emerged before the Bakery. He credits the WSA with moving beyond lip service to workers, and ramping up student-worker solidarity, at the time of the attack on Clarrie O'Shea in May 1969. In fact it was the Labor Club and RSA who did this. WSA did not exist in May 1969. Hyde writes RSA out of the picture completely, although given the lack of chronological signposts, one cannot be sure whether some of the meetings he mentions are meetings of WSA in 1970 or RSA in 1969.

By the end of 1969, most of those still involved at the Bakery had decided a more effectual, activist and militant organization was needed. WSA was set up in early 1970 in explicit rejection of RSA. This does not justify wiping RSA off the historical map. Unless one believes that the author remains hostile to the memory of RSA, which would be unlikely, or he has conflated RSA and WSA for literary convenience, it seems strange that he has completely ignored it. He himself stood for Prahran Council in August 1969 as a RSA ('Prahran Peoples Campaign') candidate (polling a total of 82 votes). With the single exception of 'Joe', the ex-IWW boot-maker (the historical Bill Genery), none of

the local Prahran left-wing political identities (Fred Farrall for example) are mentioned. Could it be that this is because most of them were political 'revisionists'?<sup>6</sup>

Not ignored but certainly reduced in stature (not just in the sections about the Bakery but in the entire book) is Darce Cassidy. Cassidy, who had already played a major activist role in Sydney, brought a wealth of political and journalistic experience to the Monash Labor Club. He was definitely the main RSA organiser at the Bakery in 1969 and an important figure in the formation of WSA. On the assumption that Cassidy's character is 'Les', Hyde mentions him only two or three times, and fleetingly at that. (Hyde and 'Les' are assigned to search for a building to rent, and they sign the Bakery lease). Hyde writes that 'the old Friday nights at Jasmine Street were resurrected at the Bakery', thus skipping over twelve months of Friday night parties at Cassidy's Shirley Grove (East St. Kilda) address in 1968.

The author's account of the protests against Billy Graham in 1969 is poorly researched. He highlights the role of 'Rick' (transparently Ron Lawson) while ignoring Jill Jolliffe. He describes it as an event, whereas in fact it was a series of events. He writes 'strangely, no-one was arrested' when in fact there were a number of protesters arrested (including myself).

Hyde is also cavalier in his treatment of the on-campus struggle at Monash, and the anti-war movement. The Monash Association of Students (MAS), the famous Mock Crucifixion, and the first Monash sit-ins (provoked by the University's co-operation with police), all of which were 1968 events, have been transported in time to around September 1967. The Saturday morning anti-war jaunts of Labor Club members to the City Square, which occurred in early 1968, are positioned sometime after the demonstration outside Dow Chemicals in October 1968. Hyde recalls speaking at the County Court in support of those charged with a raid on Honeywell. The Court appearance was October 1970 (and the raid July 1970). Hyde places it before the Moratorium, in May 1970. It is hardly surprising, after all this, that the author has skewed the origins of the women's movement as well. He describes 'Judy' attending a meeting of the 'women's movement' around October 1968 when both the movement and the term itself could hardly have existed.

There are also numerous examples of carelessness in the book. Most of them, apart from the sprinkling of typos (for example 'Philip Smart' is also 'Phillip Smart') are historical in one form or another. Was Hyde really playing Woodstock to his secondary school class in February 1969? Was it possible to listen - in the kitchen - to the songs of Margaret Roadknight in late 1968? Was Dr Jim Cairns the President of the Melbourne Moratorium, or the Chairman? Was it 'the premiers' who branded Moratorium demonstrators as 'pack-raping bikies', or was it Liberal government minister Billy Snedden? Was the Bakery three doors up from Alice's Restaurant Bookshop, or two doors up? Was the Bakery gestetner in the cellar, or the laundry? Did the Bakery upstairs only have four rooms plus bathroom, or was it six? Was it Den Bien Phu, or Dien Bien Phu? Did Mao Tse-tung write *On Contradictions* or *On Contradiction*? Was

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<sup>6</sup> The similar omission of Jill Jolliffe is discussed above.

the sign in the grass outside the Menzies Building at Monash in 1967 'No pedigree for pigs', or 'No pedigree for pigs'? Did Australians, even leftists, really liberally use the American slang term 'cool' in 1968?

Mistakes of this petty kind are no doubt unintentional but when the entire book is characterised by seismic shifts in historical time, it could be concluded that much of the literary 'amnesia' is deliberate.

One is struck by how few historical dates are given in the book. We are told it is 'Christmas', Easter' or 'June' but not which Christmas, Easter or June. On not a few occasions he mentions a July 4 demonstration without specifying which July 4. Instead of specificity there is vagueness. Phrases like 'occurred in those times' and 'it hadn't been all that long since' are common. We are told that Lou (Costello) was killed 'three years later' when we do not know which year we are in to begin with. We are told 'the end of the year results came out'. Which year? The use of dates by historians and memoirists is an indication of serious research. Dates also help to tie together a narrative and encourage a sense of causality. Speaking at his Trades Hall book launch in November 2010, the author commented that he had been under academic pressure to disregard narrative. He has not bowed to this – there is a narrative structure, albeit one that is discontinuous. However, he is really not concerned, as a historian might be, with explaining events. Causality, grounded in the interplay of the subjective and objective, is not as important to him as the purely subjective: the author's own feelings and emotions. By evading the use of dates and avoiding the issue of causality, Hyde has been able to toss his events around without regard for historical accuracy. They are lifted out of historical time, disconnected. Which chapter or period they appear in hardly matters, according to this perspective. Analysis of the ebbs and flows of the protest movement becomes impossible.

#### AID TO THE NLF - MADE UP AND MIXED UP

The author's account of the Monash Labor Club's 1967-68 campaign to aid the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam contains a number of falsehoods.

The original documents and minutes of the Monash Labor Club reveal the executive of the Club appointed a steering committee (Peter Price, Martha Campbell, Helen McCulloch and Ron Beer) in mid-1967 to make recommendations on the question of aid to the NLF. The committee reported to a Labor Club general meeting on Friday July 14. It recommended two funds – 1. unspecified fund (expression of support and solidarity). 2. fund for medical aid to the civilians in NLF areas. The steering committee's emphasis was on the former fund. The steering committee further recommended 3. the Labor Club set up a (autonomous) committee for aid to the NLF. ( A motion for acceptance of the report had been moved two days earlier at the club executive meeting by Peter Price ).

The Labor Club executive recommended the three motions to the club meeting on July 14, and they were voted on at the club meeting on Friday July 21. It is important to note that the three motions were moved on July 21 by Peter Price and seconded by President

Martha Campbell. It is also important to note this July 21 meeting was attended by a mere fifty students (out of 220 members).

In 2010, some weeks before Hyde's book appeared, *Overland* magazine (No.199) published an account by Hyde on aiding the NLF ( 'Getting out of the Boat' ). His account in the book traverses the same ground. There are no dates but he would have to be referring to the meeting of July 21. He has the large lecture hall packed to the rafters, standing room only. He introduces Amy (presumably Martha Campbell). Amy is preparing to chair the meeting. She opens proceedings by reading a letter in which she is addressed as 'Dear Mrs Amy (slut)'. 'Maybe some of us trembled a little', writes Hyde. (Interestingly, the earlier version in *Overland* has no 'maybe').

In Hyde's account, the motion to send aid to the NLF is moved by Amy and is passed untouched. Historically, and in fact, there were three motions, all of which were moved by Peter Price. Has Hyde forgotten this? Did he not research this matter? Has he perhaps decided to ignore the facts and instead go for spice and sensationalism in order to titillate his readers?

Amy's motion was 'hotly debated', writes Hyde in the *Overland* account:

'The most intense argument revolved around the sending of medical aid as opposed to unspecified aid, the preferred position of the Labor Club leadership. But money for medical aid had already been collected by the Sydney University Labor (sic) Club – and had virtually gone unnoticed. By contrast, 'unspecified aid' signalled to the NLF and to the world, 'Here's some money – use it whatever way you wish. Use it for weapons if that's what you need'.<sup>7</sup>

This account is misleading. Price's motions did not counter-pose one form of aid to the other but proposed both forms. The choice of words by Hyde would suggest to many readers that only one motion passed and that this was for unspecified aid only. In fact, of course, the motion for medical aid for civilians in NLF areas also passed. Medical aid, which Hyde implies was not militant enough for the club leaders, soon became the touchstone of militancy. The club came to an agreement with (acting) Vice-Chancellor R.R.Andrew that it could collect medical aid on campus.<sup>8</sup> After Vice-Chancellor Matheson reneged on this agreement and banned all aid to the NLF, the club established a stand in the Union foyer to collect medical aid in accordance with the previous agreement. On Tuesday September 5, three students (Hyde, Albert Langer and Bill Dowling) defied Matheson's ban and collected \$60 for medical aid. In the *Overland* account of the Union foyer (p. 16), Hyde does not mention the banners asking for medical aid. By the time the book appears, he has remembered: 'we ended up with over \$60 for *medical aid*' (p. 57).

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<sup>7</sup> For the book, Hyde changed the wording of this passage slightly. The SULC's medical aid caused 'only a ripple of concern' whereas unspecified aid asked 'which side are you on?'

<sup>8</sup> See Monash Labor Club statement, September 4.

In the book, the three students who defied the Vice-Chancellor are summoned before the University Discipline Committee (of six Deans) and fined \$20 each. (This is September 19, although Hyde does not mention the date). They are defended by barrister John Little (p. 61). As Hyde describes it, Little admonishes Matheson for saying (on September 12) that ‘collecting unspecified funds...was repugnant...and should not be permitted on campus’. This is again misleading for the innocent reader. The three students were not collecting unspecified funds. They were collecting medical funds. Little’s statement is hardly historic, so why mention it?

Hyde says that soon after the campaign took hold, ‘Lewis’ (Matheson) returned from overseas and ‘promptly’ declared any collecting of monies on campus for the NLF illegal. Actually it wasn’t promptly at all - he made this declaration on August 31, ten days after his return on August 21. At first he went along with Andrew’s policy of tolerance of medical aid – he only changed his position later.

The author’s choice of words also suggests that the Labor Club leaders wanted the unspecified aid used for weapons. In fact, the club issued numerous statements insisting ‘money sent through the unspecified fund will not be used for military purposes’.<sup>9</sup> On July 31, the club issued a statement that its fund would only be used for non-military purposes – ‘the NLF will not be using this fund for military purposes’. Peter Price re-affirmed this on August 14, Keith Jepson re-affirmed it on August 20, and Martha Campbell re-affirmed it late 1967. The club began using the term ‘unspecified civil aid’ or ‘civil aid that will not be used for military purposes’.

It is very unlikely the author would wish to portray himself and his comrades as more heroic and daring than they were. If the truth of the NLF aid campaign has been stretched to breaking point, one imagines the explanation lies somewhere between memory lapse and the extreme use of literary licence.<sup>10</sup>

## PETER PRICE

Any serious historical treatment of the Monash revolt must recognise, or at least mention, the crucially important historical role of Peter Price. Price, a fourth-year economics student in 1967, was the Monash Labor Club member who publicly initiated the plan to send aid to the NLF.<sup>11</sup> He was a member of the four-person steering committee that formulated the strategy recommended to the club general meeting on July 14. It was he who moved the three motions on July 21, and it was he who became Chairman of the Committee to Aid the NLF (CANLF) set up on July 28. As Chairman (and spokesman)

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<sup>9</sup> ‘Aid to the NLF’, statement of Committee to Aid the NLF, circa July/August 1967.

<sup>10</sup> Hyde’s article in *Overland* mentions the case of a student who confessed to having spied on the left at Monash. What also could have been mentioned is the much more interesting case of Alf Dowsley. Dowsley, a Monash student from a private school background, was approached by ASIO to spy on the student left but honourably refused. He broadcast the ASIO approach and became a firm member of the left.

<sup>11</sup> Peter Price ( email correspondence, September 4, 2011 ) remembers ‘the initial strategy and conception came about in a conversation with Albert Langer’.

of the Committee, it was Price who bore (in the form of flour bombs and a death threat) much of the public, student and redneck anger directed at the Monash Labor Club.

Some months later, in January 1968, Price accompanied Mike Hyde to China. After this, the two students flew to Cambodia.<sup>12</sup> In Phnom Penh, in defiance of both their University and the Liberal Government's repressive Defence Forces Protection Act, they personally handed over the \$500 collected at Monash to the NLF Consulate.

In the author's account of these events, for whatever strange literary reason, Price has simply vanished from history. His role, and his identity, in the earlier part of the aid campaign, has been given to, or subsumed under, the character of 'Amy', who we must assume is meant to be Monash Labor Club President Martha Campbell. His role, and his identity, in the trip to China and the handing over of the money to the NLF, has been given to, or subsumed under, the character of 'Bill'.

There is only one 'Bill' in Hyde's story but he certainly gets around. He appears to be a utility or composite character filling in or substituting for real historical figures. At least this is certainly the case with Peter Price. One can only guess whether 'Bill' is a totally invented fictional character, or at least one partly based on a real historical figure. 'Bill' first appears at the student household in Jasmine Street South Caulfield. We are told he is 'on' with Cassie. We learn his parents are teachers. Hyde and he become good friends. He joins Hyde and Geoff in burning his draft card in Collins Street. Along with Geoff he makes smoke bombs. He has contacts who can help Hyde's draft resister friend Sam Delmastro.

'Bill' is one of three students (along with 'Matt' and Hyde) who collect monies in the Monash Union foyer. At this point we are tempted to believe that 'Bill' is possibly Bill Dowling, one of the three real figures who in fact carried out the action historically. Hyde writes that 'Bill' had been elected as the chairman of the NLF Aid Committee. This is confusing. Does he mean Price or Dowling? 'Bill' is then chosen by 'Matt' (Albert Langer) to travel to China and Cambodia with Hyde. Of course, it was not Dowling who accompanied Mike Hyde to China and Cambodia, who witnessed the explosions and detonations of the Tet Offensive, who visited the NLF Consulate in Phnom Penh, and who met Wilfred Burchett. It was Peter Price. Hyde hints that he has been thinking of Price all along when he writes 'Bill decided to travel further west'. This is in fact what Price decided to do when he took off for the Himalayas at the end of their trip.

After 'Bill' has returned from the west, 'Bill' and Cassie offer Mike an acid (LSD) trip, and share a flat in St. Kilda with him. 'Bill', along with Paul, Jill, Susie, Geoff, and Hyde, pinches guns off soldiers in the Monash Union Building and runs for it. He is one of nine students disciplined by the University Council for the student occupation of the Monash Careers and Appointments Office in 1970. As if to reassure the reader, after all this, that 'Bill' is real and not some cardboard cut-out figure, Hyde writes 'Bill was a regular at the

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<sup>12</sup> In *A Decade of Dissent* (p. 89), Hyde rather patronisingly and dismissively describes his travelling companion as a 'sympathetic Monash student'.

Bakery. I'd shared a house and an acid trip with him and we'd gone to China and Cambodia together'. Really?

The account of the 'mass criticism' at the ice rink in China is telling (see pp. 85-86). He writes that both 'Bill' and he were 'disturbed' by the mass rally. 'Bill', he says, was less disturbed than others – 'Bill fell somewhere in the middle'. On November 29, 2010, I interviewed Peter Price and asked him if Hyde's account was accurate. He said he had not been merely disturbed. He had in fact been 'horrified'. The author gives no inkling of this.

There is no explanation as to why Price has been 'vanished' from history. The author may have assumed Price would be shy about his exploits appearing in the book but, along with almost everyone else, he could have been given a false name.

Given that the author has falsified history to this extent, how much of what he writes can be taken seriously as historical truth, as an accurate or authentic rendering of historical events? How much is memory? How much is invented? How much is real? How many characters described in the book are cardboard cut outs that never really existed? The question arises time and again – is the book a memoir, as it claims, or a work of fiction? Is it really an historical novel?

#### MEMOIR OR NOVEL?

Let us pause to consider - what is a novel? Fundamentally, a novel is a work of literary fiction. It will have some form of narrative structure – that is, a beginning and an end. It may contain references to historical events but the narrative is not principally concerned with the historical events. The narrative is principally concerned with creatively constructed, imagined, fictionalised events. It is, however, not legitimate in a novel to deliberately distort the truth about real historical events. For instance, historical novelists are usually meticulous, if they have seriously researched their subject, in correctly pinning down key dates. Tolstoy in *War and Peace* would have made sure he had the correct date for Napoleon's attack on Moscow. Frank Hardy in *Power Without Glory* would have made sure key historical moments of the Victorian labour movement were accurately placed in sequence. Despite this fidelity to an authentic version of history, novelists do not claim historical truth. Their works are works of the imagination.

A memoir on the other hand is not a work of the imagination. The writer of a memoir is concerned, to the extent that it is possible, with clearly recalling and accurately recording events that really happened. This will include personal memories of occasions that cannot be documented. A memoirist is entitled to claim his or her own memory as the primary source, with documentary evidence as an aid and back up. A memoir is not a history and should not be judged as such.

In the opening Prologue of her memoir about her father Brian Fitzpatrick, Sheila Fitzpatrick clarifies the essential distinction between memoir and history:

‘For now, I am an autobiographer, not a historian; I’m writing memoirs, not a history of my life ...if somebody else came and wrote my life, using all the available sources but my memory, they would (from my point of view) get it wrong’.<sup>13</sup>

However, even though the first draft of her memoir came from Fitzpatrick’s head (that is, from her memory), research was still crucial. A memoir is not a history, but historical errors should not knowingly or carelessly be allowed to pass. Memory may conflict with documentary evidence, but the memoirist does not knowingly invent things. In this respect, at least, historians and memoirists work to similar rules.

In his important essay *Flirting with Fiction*, the distinguished historian Iain McCalman argues the importance of maintaining a clear distinction between fiction and history. He explains how impulses to merge history and fiction have come from the influence of the ‘linguistic turn’ on history writing, and from the literary world:

‘...novelists rely on historical research for parts of narrative then move seamlessly into imagined history without leaving behind any markers.....’

McCalman suggests some novelists want to have their cake and eat it:

‘They can benefit from the ‘truth’ status of history without being subject to the stringent tests of evidence that historians must expect. Whether their research is thin, slanted or naively positivist, it declares itself as fact. Sixty years of debate within our profession about the epistemological and ontological status of the historical fact is utterly irrelevant. Who among their readers either knows or cares?’

McCalman cites Dan Brown (of *The Da Vinci Code*) as an exemplar of the method. Brown, he writes, ‘...remains impervious to criticism: when challenged, he can simply whip on the fig leaf of ‘fiction’ to cover his historical nakedness’.

McCalman calls for a holy war against ‘historical fraud’:

‘Complain we must; because, however imaginative they might be, works like these are committing a form of historical fraud. Ultimately they will depreciate the commodity of history itself. However curmudgeonly and boring it makes us look, we cannot allow them to pass as history because they are inventions posing as histories’.<sup>14</sup>

Another distinguished historian, Inga Clendinnen, in her essay on the pretensions of the Australian novelist Kate Grenville, has written a devastating criticism of ‘the novelisation of history’. She reports Grenville’s initial view of History as a site from which to pillage

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<sup>13</sup> Sheila Fitzpatrick, *My Father’s Daughter – Memories of an Australian Childhood*, Melbourne University Press, 2010, p. 8.

<sup>14</sup> Iain McCalman, *Flirting with Fiction*, in S.Macintyre (ed.), *The Historian’s Conscience*, Melbourne University Press, 2004. For an outline of the ‘linguistic turn’, see Ann Curthoys and John Docker, *Is History Fiction ?*, UNSW Press, 2006, chapter 7.



stories ('to make them the way we want them to be rather than the way they really were'). She quotes Grenville's admission about getting it wrong 'wilfully and knowingly'. Later, according to Clendinnen, Grenville went one big step further - she discovered she could write history. Grenville viewed her novel *The Secret River* as a work of history. This was history 'given life and flesh by a novelist's imagination beyond the constrictions of the formal discipline of history-writing'.<sup>15</sup>

Given how common the merging of history and fiction has become, it is hardly surprising that Hyde's book should be accepted and read by many as a novel. Since reading the book last November I have spoken to a number of former 'sixties' activists who believe that it is actually a novel. One such person – a central figure in the Monash events and at the Bakery – said he could not remember most of the incidents and did not expect that Hyde would either: 'How could anyone remember what happened then? He must have made it up'. This same person suggested that Hyde's Jasmine Street characters were 'made up': 'He wanted to have fewer characters so he uses composites, and he conflates WSA and 'Rev Socs' for convenience'.<sup>16</sup>

Certainly Hyde's book does have some of the characteristics and conventions of a novel. As in a novel, the author has written a narrative, albeit one that is chronologically disordered and based on vignettes and sketches strung loosely together. The false (or fictionalised) names and the cardboard cut out (composite) characters are also novelistic. In addition, there can be no doubt some of it has been made up. (The author did not live at the Bakery. One of his best friends at the time cannot remember him talking about having had a gun pointed at him. Peter Price cannot clearly remember a spy tailing them in Phnom Penh). Some elements of the love scenes must have been imagined, and some of the detailed conversations obviously must have been made up.<sup>17</sup> There are also examples of super-memory. On page 67, he remembers, and casually comments on, some passing women and their 'beautiful bums', as if one would actually remember these forty years on.

For all that, I accept that the book is a memoir.<sup>18</sup> In a novel, history (that is, past historical events) is employed as background, but the basic narrative, and the main point of the work, is the imagined storyline. In Hyde's book the historical events *are* the storyline: the invented or imagined bits are incidental.

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<sup>15</sup> Inga Clendinnen, *The History Question – Who Owns the Past?* Quarterly Essay 23, Black Inc, 2006. A view attributed to Grenville by Clendinnen is that 'historians create only a 'world of facts'; novelists do stimulate our imaginations that we think we are actually there'.

<sup>16</sup> If indeed Hyde has conflated these two organizations he has done so to his own disadvantage in telling the story. Such conflation would make for a more superficial account than is advisable or necessary.

<sup>17</sup> As Clendinnen points out, historians are 'cruelly limited' – they 'can't do conversations'. See Clendinnen, *The History Question – Who Owns the Past?* Quarterly Essay 23, Black Inc, 2006.

<sup>18</sup> I discount the possibility of Hyde's book being both a novel and a memoir. This was the view of Melbourne University historian Verity Burgmann when I spoke to her on December 6 – 'it is a mixture of novel and memoir'.

Only people who were not there, or people who have forgotten, could believe the book is made up mainly of imagined or invented (fictionalised) events. Though disguised by invented names, most of the key characters in the book are recognisable, to those who have remembered or researched the times, as real historical figures. (One of them is myself – ‘Ken the folksinger’). Though he has altered or invented facts, he has not made most of it up. He has not imagined it. He has called on his memory, and his descriptions are, for the most part, acutely observant. These are things he can remember happening historically. This is what one is entitled to expect from a memoir. If the book were a novel, Hyde would have invented a false name and identity for himself as well. Instead, the recognisable and historical Mike Hyde is the central and pivotal character, the first-person narrator throughout. He is not omniscient – he does not and cannot peer into the minds of other characters - but he is able to expose his own thoughts and feelings. His memories are not imagined; they are real.

In Part One of the book, Hyde does what no novel narrator is allowed to do. He muses on what historically lays in store for him – ‘a beating, interrogation, guns at your head, phone taps, Special Branch’. A first-person narrator knowing in advance what the future holds is hardly what one expects in a novel.

The front cover title, the back cover publisher’s blurb, and the back cover recommendation of Humphrey McQueen, all claim the book as a memoir. In his ‘Acknowledgements’ at the front of the book, Hyde mentions his novel *Hey Joe* – ‘the precursor to the memoir’. There is nothing in the ‘Acknowledgements’ to suggest he has written a novel – in fact he thanks people for the factual material on which the book is based. Clearly, he planned to write something that had claims to historical accuracy. He concludes the book by re-affirming this original intention: ‘...my memories would always be grist for the mill, keeping me and the rest of my mates on the road that led to changing the world’.

## CONCLUSION

So, how do we judge this memoir?

Given the book announces itself as memoir, and Hyde is both author and first-person narrator, many ordinary readers would almost certainly assume they are reading something resembling historical ‘truth’ (give or take a few pseudonyms, and a little bit of unreliable memory).

This is why the book is not fair to the ordinary reader. He or she is given no clue when the narrative shifts from historical ‘truth’ to fiction and back again.

The work has so many structural errors of historical sequence that this must be deliberate. These are not simple errors of fact. The author knowingly alters the sequence of events. I cannot believe Hyde could really believe Karl Armstrong was in China in 1968, not long after Jasmine Street, but for some reason to do with the structuring of the book he puts him there. Whatever literary arguments could be raised to justify this kind of

writing, it is not a legitimate practice for a memoir. Nor is it legitimate to cite real historical events and, as the author admitted to me that he has done with the saga of the milkman's horse, knowingly make up things that did not actually happen at those events, suggesting to readers that they did.

Iain McCalman's injunction against what he calls 'plot enhancements without any historical warrant' applies to memoirists as well as historians:

'When in the future we historians flirt with the models and styles of fiction, we need at the same time to make clear that our two enterprises remain separated by the one simple and unbridgeable distinction that historians cannot make up their facts (however elusive the status of a fact might be)'.<sup>19</sup>

The liberal use of pseudonyms means the author can slip from fact to fiction and back again throughout the book without indicating when this is happening. Calling Karl 'Kurt' for instance means he can put him in whatever year he likes. Calling Peter Price 'Bill' means he can write what he likes about the trip to Cambodia. Someone who has researched the period, or who can identify the historical identities hidden behind the false names, may be able to discern the shift from fact to fiction (and vice versa), but the ordinary reader is at the author's mercy. This method invites complaints from those written out of the story or those historically misrepresented.

In her autobiographical work, *My Father's Daughter – Memories of an Australian Childhood*, Sheila Fitzpatrick obliges her readers with an opening prologue, spelling out the method she used in grappling with the tension between memory and 'fact'. An introductory chapter or preface explaining the author's method and coming clean on his literary purposes might have gone some way to alleviating the credibility problems referred to. Why the false names? Why not false names for everyone? Why the chronological confusion?

In my Masters thesis on the Bakery (*The Yeast is Red*), written in 1994, I included an introduction explaining to the reader that the diary entries sprinkled through the text were invented (fictional) and not to be taken as real historical documents. This was done in order to keep faith with the reader. Unfortunately, because he has not respected his readers by including an introduction and defining what it is, Michael Hyde has diminished his book.

Those who interpret the book as a novel will not be bothered by the historical mistakes. More than likely they will not be aware of them. If there is poor research, poor memory, or even deliberate falsification, who cares as long as the book is a good read? At the same time, the book announces itself as a serious memoir of the times.

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<sup>19</sup> Iain McCalman, *Flirting with Fiction*, in S. Macintyre (ed.), *The Historian's Conscience*, Melbourne University Press, 2004. McCalman writes '...if I have connived in allowing the book to *seem* like a fiction to the extent that readers and reviewers become confused, then I must stand condemned'.

I have said at the outset that Michael Hyde deserves enormous credit for attempting and publishing his memoir of the sixties, but it is a memoir that is historically problematic. Nonetheless it successfully communicates those times and the way young people like Mike Hyde were swept into revolutionary politics.

End.