



Carol Porter, Get Elected, 1997, silkscreen print. State Library of Victoria: pi001700.

Thursday 28 July
1pm Milgate Room, ADH

Morgan Burgess

Women's suffrage and the body in *A Few Hours in a Far Off Age*

In 1883 Henrietta Dugdale, an outspoken Australian suffragist, published a speculative fiction called *A Few Hours in a Far Off Age*. Written in response to parliamentary discussion of Victorian women's enfranchisement, the novel imagines a utopia where both men and women hold equal political power. Written as the recollections of an Australian woman transported in a dream from the 1880s into the future, to an idyllic land called Alethia, the novel explores the possible social and physical outcomes of women's active political citizenship.

Fredric Jameson argues that, in literature, if a utopia is to flourish it must be preceded by the total destruction of the previous social order. In Dugdale's novel this destructive force extends from the physical landscape to a rewriting of human biology itself. This paper examines the metaphor of the body as it is used by Dugdale to articulate the imagined, utopian implications of women's enfranchisement. In the novel, utopia is writ large on the bodies that inhabit the text; changes in the body politic are rendered in the very physicality of its citizens. This paper explores the way that Dugdale juxtaposes the narrator's experience of life as a woman in 1880s Australia with the *mode de vie* observed in Alethia, to highlight the significance she imagines women's suffrage to have in bringing about positive social change.

Morgan Burgess completed her undergraduate studies at ANU. She is now in her second year of PhD at UNSW Canberra with Nicole Moore as supervisor. She is researching the literary discourse surrounding the fight for women's voting rights around the turn of the twentieth century in Australia and New Zealand. Earlier this year she spent six weeks at the National Library of Australia as a Summer Scholar researching the suffrage literature published in colonial newspapers and magazines.



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