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Reviews

Dirt Music
Tim Winton
Picador, 2001

The middle-brow reading groups, with their fondness for serious and humane fiction and contemporary issues, are no doubt already voraciously consuming this novel, as they have Tim Winton's previous publications, especially *Cloudstreet.* And rightly so, as it has even more to recommend it. It is assertively regional, tellingly evoking coasts known only to locals (many of whom are disarmingly described as "hillbillies", "white trash" and "bogans"), "big-knuckled fishermen", truckies, gap-toothed bikers, Christmas holiday-makers/ragers, sailboarders, backpackers and SADS ("See Australia and Die"), the "grey nomads" who feature in the second half of what becomes a kind of ritual travelogue. The novel is crowded with contemporary "pilgrims, traders, refugees, crusaders, lunatics" (252), and with druggies, ferals, escapees and those who live vividly by the senses.

Winton's are ravishingly beautiful and sensuous landscapes haunted by contact history (much more lightly sketched in this novel than in *Cloudstreet*) and by the pain of race paranoia (there are some unrepentant Hansonite characters), and by other more quotidian pains – of sudden and not-so-sudden losses, of protracted deaths by cancer and drugs, of rapes, of unrequited love, of histories that threaten to perpetuate their miseries. The novel concerns itself centrally with the question of recovery of the will to live after overpowering grief.

With its long and elaborate resolution, it is a novel which meets a certain kind of readerly desire for benign closure. It will please many, but its utopics does make the novel seem as if it belongs to a different, and more romantic world from the conflictual one outlined *en passant.* It can be argued in Winton's defence that he is the master of prolepsis. Lu Fox's island refuge of Parts VII and VIII brings him by a circuitous, propitiatory route, punctuated by encounters with the Aboriginal past and deracinated present, into the life-giving/restoring arms of his beloved. But not before soul and body are reduced to shreds which know only that they live, and that "the world lives in him" (451).

Perhaps the most remarkable (and incredible?) moral transformation of the text is that of the feudal lord of the town (significantly named White Point), Jim Buckridge, who seeks to "make over" his heritage, to overwrite a "vengeful balance sheet" and to make amends for a lifetime of abuse of power which culminated in a rape, and a series of events that Lu concatenates in his mind. Sal's rape and Debbie's cancer are seen, in a New Age gesture, as related, and, though perpetrated by Jim's feudal "enforcer", Shover McDougall and (perhaps in pursuit of his own ideological agendas), the killing of Lu's dog is yet another exercise of feudal power and pointless cruelty. Although one can admire the hints that White Point Jim is more complex and vulnerable than he can articulate, the lack of the will to use him as a focaliser vitiates the achievement, and his credibility. Characters are often quite emblematic and underdeveloped in this novel. Winton's focus is more insistently on Luther's and Georgie's return from the dead. There is no doubt that her breath of life, her enactment of what she does best (nursing), serves to remove Lu from his state of being half in love with easeful death. Despite Georgie's feistiness, does Winton's creation of this nurturing, serving female character constitute a nostalgic, regressive throwback to Winton's beloved fifties?

Although the novel's resolution will be named as a Christian moment by many readers, with some (unsustained) gestures towards a hybrid postcolonialism, I would argue that it is not that. Rather, what we're offered in this novel is an attempt, using the lexicon of Christianity for want of a better one that might serve, to invent a language for an earthed and embodied sacred.

This enterprise is also, and not surprisingly, the one that generates the most distinguishing feature of this novel, its vernacular poetry, its "dirt music" (95, 306). At its simplest, there is a brave attempt to render in its own argot a flawed community of midwest coastal White Pointers – a "savage, unruly lot" (17), "squalid", "foul-mouthed", "maybe [only] five years out of the van park" but hiding their shiners under duty-free make-up (18). Winton is uncompromising in his use of unfamiliar fishing-village cant: unfamiliar vocabulary items are never glossed or explained, and often poetic and inventive. If the context does not explain what a "stove-in Martin dreadnought" (52) is, or a "mull-hit" (62), or if you don't know brand-names, they will not otherwise be knowable from print/electronic sources. One knows that the moment of uncovering the mysterious "black steel pipe" is a significant one (336–37), but to what does it refer? Is it to be understood symbolically? What does it mean for wind to "curry" the brown grass? Are we thinking of those bodgie combs, or of herbs and spices? Or maybe both? The sheerly poetic nature of Winton's prose makes the *process* of reading the joy, a joy which rewards more fully than the contrived resolution.

The novel articulates a one hundred year old tradition in Australian writing: battlerdom, and moreover gives it a new romantic spin. Although the Winton world is tacky, tilted and in crisis, changing radically with each blow-in from the highway or the city, there is a sense that something in it is worth celebrating: it is, in Winton's make-do lexicon, "holy", "sacramental". Both Fox and Georgie, and even some of the minor

characters like Bird, Axle and Bess, in different ways feel this. *Holy* and *sacramental* are perhaps compromise words, drawn from Christian discourses to talk of experiences that are almost beyond speech. They are used to define moments of grace, again not a religious moment *per se*, but sacred ones, when body is reduced to its sensate fundamentals:

> Those days you could come down here and stand in the water on the shallow spit and clear your mind. Stare at the sun-torched surface and break it into disparate coins of light. Actually stop thinking and go blank. It was harder than holding your breath. You could stand there, stump-still, mind clean as an animal's, and hear melons splitting in the heat. A speck of light, you were, an ember. And happy. Even after his mother died he had it, though it waned. Later on only music got him there. And now that is gone there is only work. It's a world without grace. Unless the only grace left is simply not feeling the dead or sensing the past. (104)

There are many such reductive (in the best *back-to-basics* sense) sacred moments: Georgie's eating of the pindan country soil (214); or hearing the music of the earth in the yellow pellet (337); or Lu's plunging his arm up to his elbow into the fizz of a fermenting watermelon (223); or listening to the reductive one note of music on his improvised drone (with its various tonalities for the ways in which Georgie has entered his consciousness) (402); or Bess's compulsive need to hear Arvo Pärt's music of death in her own "arvo" (373). The sacred seems to be being defined as what ties human beings to special places (for example, Georgie's imaginative attachment to her island, which played out in Lu, connects them in the final two sections of the novel), and what connects them with their animal, embodied natures. The "links in things" are what impels Bess's philosophy (249). What complicates the simplicity of such fundamental experiences, for Winton, seems to be the all too human consciousness (and pain) of loss or impending loss. How he treats, for example, the experience which catapults Georgie into an identity crisis, her failure as a nurse to deal with the in-your-face (literally) tumour of Mrs. Jubail, is crucial to this. Death, for Georgie, as for Lu, is a "blind alley" (197) that is almost impossible to negotiate, but negotiated it is, even if quite factitiously and at the risk of excessively end-stopped romanticism, by Winton for both of them. The novel insistently rubs its readers noses in the corporeality of death, its "teeth" (361).

The sense of connectedness to earth and sea, and the connections created by music, and between gifted adults and illuminated "angel" children like Bird, are easier to negotiate when the experiences are rhapsodic and utopic: when Lu learns to coexist with and enjoy the sharks for their "holy" power (356–57), or when he remembers his dysfunctional but contented household before the catastrophe (109–16, 370), or his mother before her death (360–61). It is the latter's romantic, utopic teaching in his childhood about the "holiness" of living things that the resolution enforces uncritically.

The world may "[mean] us no harm" at a personal level, but it is not benign in Winton's west. It does not allow whitefellas unmediated survival.

In this novel Winton is more circumspect about postcolonial issues than in his earlier fiction. The landscape is a haunted one, with memories of escapees from "protection" as recent as the generation preceding Luther's. Winton allows to stand a curious metaphoric identification whereby watermelon seeds being spat out stand for Aborigines (114): does he mean to imply that Indigenous peoples have been displaced in order to grow watermelons? Does the biblical quotation ("If a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered") used by Lu to soften the impact of the equation on the children's sensitivities in fact serve the situation? The strangely hybrid encounter of Lu with the Wandjinna figures in the cave (which elicits wonder plus an involuntary, clearly atavistic sign of the cross) stands more as a ritual, perhaps New Age gesture than as a thought-through politics. The sadly eclectic and self-described "lost" Aborigine, Axle, who is searching for his Country, is represented as generously bestowing a kayak on Lu whom he apparently sees as a fellow traveller. He requires that Lu do his soul-country search experientially rather than with maps. This is, I suggest, whitefella writing keeping a respectful, perhaps intimidated, distance from an issue that genuinely concerns him and with which he is prepared to make common cause but does not feel free to because of fear of being seen as appropriative. One wonders if the improvised drone which intones the dirt music is intended to stand as a land-inspired European instrument which answers in some resonant way the drone of the didgeridoo? If so, the comparison is a muted and understated one.

I recommend this novel highly and expect that it will be of great interest as a centre for debate about contemporary mores with our students, both in Literature and Cultural Studies. It's not as brave a novel intellectually as Pat Jacobs' *Going Inland* which covers some of the same territory and it's not as radical as Stow's testament to human insignificance, *Tourmaline*, the other novel with which it bears interesting comparison and which emanates from the same dirt. However, its (contestable) romantic redefinitions of what it is to be human in the Australian context will energise readers.

Frances Devlin Glass, Deakin University

The Captive White Woman of Gipps Land: In Pursuit of the Legend
Julie Carr
Melbourne UP, 2001

The white Australian imaginary has been shaped by the stories we have chosen to tell about ourselves. This process of selection is not an innocent one. It is bound up with the power relations that largely define a settler-society. The last few years, especially, have been witness to much public and political debate over precisely what Australian

history is, and whether or not it can be more accurately characterised as a "Black Armband" or "White Blindfold" version. The enduring debate over how we narrate the nation requires us to take a fresh look at some of those stories or legends we have used in the process of nation building. Julie Carr's account of the captive White Woman thus serves an important role, not only in looking anew at a particular national story, but in suggesting how this story has been mobilised, and in whose interests.

In the 1840s in the settlement of Port Phillip, a rumour persisted that the Aborigines or Kurnai people of "Gipps Land" (the lexical convention employed in this period) were holding a white woman captive. Carr has utilised an impressive range of primary and secondary sources in her comprehensive and detailed analysis of this story, demonstrating a high level of scholarly endeavour. She provides an extremely detailed account of the various reported "sightings" of the White Woman, but is less concerned with determining the veracity of these stories than with exploring how they have been mobilised by white men to serve their own interests. The "eye witness" accounts of the vulnerable and helpless White Woman resonated very powerfully with white colonists in a new and unfamiliar setting. Such reportage (which invariably utilised highly emotive and provocative language) functioned as cautionary tales reminding newcomers of the precarious nature of the colonial endeavour. Carr shows that the number of privately sponsored, as well as government supported crusades to "save" the White Woman, while ostensibly undertaken in her honour, served in reality to further the interests of white men who wanted to see themselves as "humane, ennobled and civilised" (89). The fact that the story of the White Woman has endured since 1840 attests to the very important function it has served in his/story.

Carr argues that the fantasy of the captive White Woman not only provided the white male crusaders with a flattering image of themselves, it simultaneously served to deflect many of the "unpalatable truths about what settlement entailed" (41). The White Woman story operated to absolve or assuage colonists of any feelings of guilt they might have attached to the colonising mission. The tale of the White Woman, and the attendant notions of Aboriginality therein, served to locate both Gipps Land as well as the Kurnai within colonial discourse. Carr shows that during the course of the various expeditions (or punitive raids) to recover the White Woman, the crusaders "discovered" new lands of promise "awaiting settlement and development" (107). The various journals kept by the crusaders, as well as the cartographic records they drew, served to reinscribe Kurnai territory as colonial space. The story of the White Woman, in other words, provided the pretence for the appropriation of Kurnai land. The personal testimonies of the leaders of the various expeditions also served to construct Kurnai men as "ruthless savages" who practiced cannibalism, polygamy and mistreated "their" women. Negative stereotypes of Aboriginality were constructed and mobilised to justify the mistreatment and murder of the Kurnai. As Carr argues, the image of the White Woman functioned as a metaphor "for the feminised land as contested possession between white and black men" (155).

Carr's analysis of the legend of the captive White Woman is well structured, beginning with an exploration of the various versions of the story itself, followed by her assessment of the public furore ignited by the rumours. She makes a number of very convincing arguments about the various functions that this story served. What her analysis lacks, however, is a detailed exploration of the purpose the story continues to serve in contemporary society. Her examination of the story's re/production in the late 1800s provides much necessary background material, but it is made at the expense of an in-depth consideration of the symbolic functioning of the story today. Out of 250 pages, only the last fifty examine the story's reproduction in various literary and artistic accounts, almost all of which have been perpetuated in "the guise of quaint, mythic, colourful, or romantic tales" (180) (the vast majority of which have been produced by white men). Carr sights the widespread critical acclaim accorded Liam Davison's 1994 novel *The White Woman* as proof of the persisting popularity of the White Woman story, but does not proffer a reason for its enduring appeal. Davison's account of the story differs from the other literary and artistic interpretations considered by Carr because it provides a critique of frontier violence and the discourses of colonisation and white masculinity. But does the popularity of Davison's account stem from its critique of the story, or is it just another (slightly modified) version of a popular narrative Australians like to tell about themselves? Is it an indication that recent narratives of nation are refusing to add to the historical silencing of (white) women and Aboriginal peoples?

In her concluding comment Carr argues that it is impossible to divorce the actions of the past from their ramifications in the present. This is most certainly the case but, paradoxically, Carr's assertion is undermined by her relative lack of attention to the story's rehabilitative function in contemporary Australian society. The story of the White Woman (one that is almost totally devoid of women, as such) is another white masculinist story that serves the national interest in that it constructs colonisers as victims. Like so many other stories of Australian nationhood, from the hardships suffered by early explorers like Burke and Wills, to the tragic loss of life at Galipolli, it suggests the way in which Australian narratives of nation have often worked to bolster white male valour and heroism. Carr's analysis of the legend of the captive White Woman shows very clearly that it served the interests of nation building in the nineteenth century. In its construction of white victimisation at the hands of "ruthless" Aboriginal (or "Warrigal") "savages", it worked to justify the violent abuse of the Kurnai and the appropriation of their land, while simultaneously absolving white colonists of any guilt for their role within that process. While the story itself has proven to be an enduring one, perhaps what is even more lasting is the notion of white victimisation upon which it rests.

Peta Stephenson, University of Melbourne

Prosthetic Gods: Travel, Representation and Colonial Governance **Robert Dixon** **U of Queensland P, 2001**

Academic postcolonialism has always been accompanied by internal debates not only about the analytical assumptions adequate to the study of "colonial discourse", but about the viability of such a totalising, abstract object in the first place. Anxieties about the way in which the field has developed are quite lucidly reflected in the tensions that beset it – tensions between the rhetorical and the historical, the theoretical and the empirical, and the global and the local. Rob Dixon's *Prosthetic Gods* is very directly engaged with these issues. It questions the theoretical nature of poststructuralist critique and offers an alternative to it through its own exploration of the complexities inherent in the relationship between culture and governance. These complexities, Dixon suggests, are more often than not elided by postructuralist-inspired postcolonialists, whose prioritisation of the rhetorical over the historical generates a level of abstraction that effectively reduces the practices of colonialism to a set of ubiquitous, representational tropes. The book's introduction draws upon Nicholas Thomas's *Colonialism's Culture* to make the point that though culture – the field of representation – is implicated in the practice of colonial governance, it is not simply synonymous with it, as work in postcolonial studies so often assumes. Taking up Thomas's lead, and very deliberately displacing figures like Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak in the process, *Prosthetic Gods* proceeds to explore the ways in which culture and governance are implicated in each other, while always being careful not to collapse the two or to be seduced by the easy "metaphorical conflation of text, ideology and the state" (6–7) in which the political justification of so much contemporary scholarship is couched. As is very quickly apparent, this opening discussion of postcolonial literary studies is crucial to the purpose of the book as a whole. This is not only because Dixon's chapters trace the relationship between diverse forms of representation and governmental practice in an empirically grounded manner, but because his focus on white Australia's relationship with its tropical territories in Melanesia offers a level of geo-political specificity often precluded by the rhetorical approach, in which a set of textual relations is granted a general validity that leaves little room for the particulars of more tangible fields of engagement.

In order to open up the complexities of his material, Dixon also introduces a set of terms designed to capture the shifting relationship between culture and governance. "Domains of practice", differentiated "economies", modes of circulation, and "modular" representational media all point to relations that cannot be thematised ahead of time according to an abstract logic, but that must be worked through in each case. Dixon shows that white Australian representations of the Torres Strait Islands, Papua and New Guinea, obeying the diverse logics of the market and the culture industry, don't always or simply collude with government policy. On the contrary, the relationship between cul-

ture and governance involves moments of continuity and discontinuity. This is the great strength of the book. We are used to finding meaning only in the conflation of power and knowledge. *Prosthetic Gods*, while not ignoring the moments at which representation and governance clearly do sustain each other, also foregrounds moments in which their relationship is simply too complicated to facilitate the reduction of the one to the other. It is at these moments, and the book is full of them, that Dixon genuinely strikes out into new ground. By exploring diverse "domains of practice", including the development of tropical medicine and social hygiene, mass produced and globally circulated visual culture, travel writing, popular fiction and colonial administration, the book offers a much richer account of colonial cultural production, and of early twentieth-century Australian culture in general, than less empirically grounded work.

The richness of the book also makes it difficult to summarise neatly. The chapters don't reproduce each other, nor do they generate a seamless account of a coherent object (part of the point of the book is to suggest the impossibility of a totalising summary of the relationship between travel, representation and governance). Dominant themes, nevertheless, do recur through out, the most compelling of which is that indexed in the phrase, from Freud's *Civilization and its Discontents*, which supplies the book's title. "Prosthetic gods" suggests the book's interest in how technology and in particular technologies of representation are integrated into an image of white subjectivity in which the coloniser's desire for mobility, optical authority and, stemming from these, cultural ascendancy, is realised. In the case of Frank Hurley's filming of Ross Smith's England–Australia flight and his subsequent Papua travel documentaries, Dixon explores the ways in which the development of aerial photography engendered conceptions of time and space conducive to the new subjectivity of what he calls a "prosthetic modernity" in which the modern subject is granted "mobility, vision, the ability to see into the life of primitive things without himself being seen" (79). This paradigm, a version of what Mark Seltzer has called the body-machine complex, is not offered as an abstract postulation. On the contrary Dixon's two chapters on Hurley (chapters two and three) trace the development of the paradigm out of very specific technological developments – the consolidation of aerial photography after the first world war – and then follow its different uses across a number of "domains of practice", such as "entertainment, advertising, commercial aviation, tourism and colonial administration" (48). Subjectivity is shown to be very tangibly embodied in modes of representation, the affective power of which then circulates in the form of the mass culture commodity. If cinematic representations of Papua ultimately contribute to the raw material of an imperial imaginary, they do so, Dixon suggests, in an indirect, highly mediated manner. The "popular aesthetic of visual culture" developing here might have the "latent capacity to motivate projects in the domain of governance", but it also operated independently of it, obeying its own irreducible logic (88). The notion of prosthetic modernity links very diverse endeavours in this book: from Raphael Cilento and J.S.C. Elkington's work on tropical health, to Hurley's interests in aviation and cinema, to Frank Clune's fetishisation of technology.

Another powerful theme here, one that runs alongside the idea of prosthesis, is the triangulation of colonialism, modernity and suburbia. It is most evident in chapter one, on the development of tropical medicine, and chapter six, on James McAuley's relationship with Papua as both an academic at the Australian School of Pacific Administration and as a social critic who disidentified with elements of modernity. In his discussion of tropical medicine, Dixon explores the ways in which an idea of modern bourgeois suburban life informs perceptions of the tropics and Melanesia, enabling him to demonstrate that colonial experience, especially as it is worked through administrative, governmental practice, also plays an important role in the development of an Australian modernity, as conceptions of social hygiene embodied in suburbia were in part at least worked out as forms of colonial governance. This idea recurs in the chapter six, though here McAuley emerges as a fascinatingly conflicted figure, implicated in colonial administration, but also opposed to the vapid, disenchanted modernity he saw taking hold in New Guinea, and by implication suburban Australia. The book's account of the relationship between an Australian metropole and its colonial territories suggests some of the ways in which colonial discourse can take on a distinctly antipodean inflection. If the suburb emblematises modernity, or the metropolitan, it can only do so in a highly ambivalent manner, shot through with anxieties about the extent to which the suburb itself constitutes a marginal space between the imperial city, as it might have been imagined in the nineteenth century, and the "contact zone".

Arguably the most anomalous chapter in the book, but also arguably the most interesting from the point of view of academics raised on textual critique, is the chapter on Ion L. Idriess's representation of the Torres Strait. Grounding Idriess's popular travel and adventure fiction in the anthropological work it draws upon, Dixon mounts a fascinating argument about the ways in which depictions of tribal life displace a whole range of white Australian anxieties about the moral agency of both colonial and military endeavour. The chapter convincingly demonstrates that images of violence and sovereignty linked to Islander society embody characteristics that elsewhere can be and were attributed to white subjects. The trope of captivity itself is a good example of this in that it elides the extent to which Torres Strait Islanders were themselves "captives in their homes to the regime of the Queensland Aborigines Protection Act" (119).

Prosthetic Gods is at least partly an act of recovery. One of the stunning things about it is the amount of popular material it uses. This is not a book about the usual suspects, not one too interested in revisionist negotiations with an established cultural canon. On the contrary it presents figures who belong to the worlds of popular fiction, travel writing, and entertainment, and demonstrates that these often neglected genres of cultural production yield up fascinating opportunities to chart the continuities and discontinuities between culture and governance. This alone significantly expands our understanding of exactly what constituted early- to mid-twentieth-century Australian culture. It also functions as a spur to further research: Dixon's method of working "upwards from detailed evidence" is also an invitation, one that I imagine researchers

pursuing with excitement. *Prosthetic Gods* is a path-breaking book that will be indispensable to researchers involved in colonial discourse analysis yet mindful of the problems that beset postcolonial theory as its global paradigms move into local contexts. Dixon invites us to rethink the relationship between culture and colonial governance in a specifically Australian-Melanesian context, and in doing so establishes a research agenda that will keep scholars busy for a long time to come.

Andrew McCann, University of Melbourne

The Gauche Intruder: Freud, Lacan and the White Australian Fantasy
Jennifer Rutherford
Melbourne UP, 2000

One of the difficulties that has plagued psychoanalytic cultural studies is the imprecise yet often presumed homology between the clinic and the cultural field. There is a fundamental dissimilarity between an analysand who seeks analysis, pays a fee, speaks and listens, and an event or formation in culture which cannot free associate or partake in the dialectical cure which is analysis. Perhaps this is why so many clinicians have expressed their concern about those aspects of cultural studies that claim to represent psychoanalysis. This is not to say that psychoanalysis is not applicable to the social field, or that a subject's neuroses isn't symptomatic of a social phenomenon, rather it points out that, because the two realms aren't analogous, the psychoanalytic hermeneutic must be "translated" into the cultural field. Jennifer Rutherford's *The Gauche Intruder* expertly manages such a translation. True to the psychoanalytic tradition, the book illuminates the paradoxes at the heart of human behaviour. Following from Freud and Lacan's work on the rapport between morality and aggression, Rutherford explains how aggressivity to the Other has been concealed through a moral code of Australian neighbourliness in a variety of disparate cultural practices.

It is fitting then that Rutherford begins her analysis of the Australian moral code with the words of a One Nation polling booth worker, since speech, in psychoanalytic practice, always delivers the subject beyond his or her intentions. "You're my neighbour," says a One Nation supporter, bemoaning the loss of trust and generosity in the Australian community, "if you had a flat tyre I'd help you" (6). According to Rutherford, One Nation supporters perceive themselves as part of a moral movement that seeks to restore a lost Australian moral code. For One Nation, this moral code has been corrupted by those people who refuse to play fair, who sustain hierarchies, and who stand in the way of community solidarity. Conversely, for One Nation and the Australian tradition, a neighbour is someone who is both generous to the other in times of need and who believes vehemently in equality. This code of neighbourliness, argues

Rutherford, has been central to the way White Australian's have distinguished themselves from other nationalities. In the case of One Nation, identification with the Australian Good provides a screen through which One Nation supporters perceive themselves and the nation as quintessentially good. What is most striking, however, is that as soon as One Nation attempts to mobilise their ethic of neighbourliness, it manifests itself as aggression to the Other – Aborigines, intellectuals, professionals and "urban elites". For One Nation supporters, it is difference itself that thieves the Good that "real" Australians deserve.

While media commentary has focussed on the obvious racist overtones of the One Nation party, Rutherford points out how this aggressivity is formed from the paradoxical desire to do good. For Rutherford this paradox is at the heart of ethical and subjective action. Any attempt to suture the ego to a master-signifier like the Australian Good only sharpens the boundaries from which the ego can disidentify with the Other. The construction of rigid boundaries of selfhood serves to intensify aggressivity. While this ethical paradox has also been identified in postcolonial and poststructural criticism, the psychoanalytic intervention is to stress how this process is endemic to both ethical acts and to subjectivity itself. If what one dislikes is abjected or projected on to the Other, one also creates a neighbour within the self which psychoanalysis has termed the unconscious.

Rutherford's project is to look at the way the fantasy of the Australian Good camouflages its aggressivity to the Other throughout Australian history. For Rutherford, it is literature that is most emblematic of this aggressivity. She chooses a range of canonical texts from the nineteenth and twentieth century to illustrate this point. Among these are Catherine Helen Spence's *Clara Morison,* Rose Praed's *Lady Bridget in the Never-Never Land*, Ralph Bolderwood's *Robbery Under Arms*, Henry Handel Richardson's *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*, George Johnston's *My Brother Jack*, David Malouf's *Johnno* and Tim Winton's *The Riders*. Though often provocative and engaging in her treatment of these texts, it should be noted that Rutherford assumes rather than proves the homology between literature and the social field. Although other critics – Pierre Macherey for instance – have gone to great lengths to support this link, Rutherford does not theorise why literature is a privileged cultural site that mirrors social pathologies. Since there are only a handful of texts chosen from each century, the argument could also benefit from some explanation of why these texts in particular are especially emblematic of the aggression Rutherford takes to be pervasive in Australian culture, and not simply exceptions that prove her case. Nevertheless, the readings of these texts, especially those of Richardson, White, Johnston and Winton, are provocative and convincing.

In her discussion of Richardson's *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*, Rutherford argues that Richard's pyscho-drama is symptomatic of a broader cultural problem implicit in Australia's attempt to realise itself as new nation. While Mahony is a diasporic subject who belongs neither to the Old World nor the New World, it is his wife Mary who is the embodiment of a new and vital Australia. Richard is pompous and odiously class-conscious, whereas Mary is egalitarian and friendly. She is perfectly at home in the

colony "mirroring the New World ethos of affability, open-handedness, unimaginative practicality and the performance of levelling equality" (94). It is through Mary, argues Rutherford, that we see the construction of an Australian ego-ideal or gaze from which Richard views his own subjectivity. As with her analysis of One Nation, Rutherford points out that anything that appears outside of the Australia Good, constructed here through the novel's affirmation of Mary as the metonym of Australia, is dismissed with a degree of aggressivity. For Rutherford, it is Mary who articulates the denial of Richard's wishes through her constant refrain, "Richard . . . how could you?" (97). It is not only Richard's interest in music, literature, spirituality and solitude that are despised by Mary, but the articulation of the wish itself, which hence appears un-Australian. In contrast to the many feminist readings of the novel, Rutherford argues that Mary is in fact the phallicised representative of the Australian Good, and Mahony, the abject feminine. As the novel progresses, says Rutherford, Mary becomes one with the law of the Australian good. She conceives of Richard's gradual plight to ignominy as a punishment for his failure to be interpellated by the Australian Good.

Rutherford's reading of George Johnston's *My Brother Jack* also highlights the way in which the Australian Good is realised through the negation of a central character, David Meredith. She argues that *My Brother Jack* is coterminous with the historical moment in the twentieth century when Australia refinds itself. For Rutherford, the expatriate George Johnston conflates everything of value with Jack and everything deplorable with David. What critical commentary has failed to see, says Rutherford, is that Jack's idealisation only occurs through Meredith's masochism. Indeed, the novel is structured around Meredith being the antithesis of Jack. Jack is a paragon of Australian masculinity: laconic, easy going and a real larrikin. He defies authority, lacks pretension, and is frank on all matters including sex. Jack is the one who opposes his father's violence and the one who sticks up for the bohemian artist Sam Burlington, like a good mate, when he is falsely accused of murdering his own girlfriend. Conversely, David is always on the wrong side of Jack's law. He pretends not to know Burlington when the police question him and he is effeminate and passive with women. Meredith may be excellent with words but words are secondary to action. Action here, as either sex or fighting, is troped as masculine and writing as feminine. Even though recent critics have argued that Jack's injuries, his incapacity to fight and his ordinariness in the face of Meredith's fame deconstruct the embattled Australian ideal, Rutherford claims these injuries invite readers to further identify with Jack, as they too might feel, like One Nation supporters, that they have been betrayed by an alien Other. His injuries serve to bolster rather than negate his heroism.

Rutherford locates a similar structure of self-abnegation in Tim Winton's *The Riders.* Although the central character Scully, like Jack, is perpetually injured and humiliated in the novel, as he searches for his wife, who has taken all their money, left him with their child and run off with a lesbian lover, Scully's suffering serves only to highlight his Australian everyman qualities. Scully is honest, hard working and easy going. In this way the novel sustains the fantasy of a good Australian being duped by a sophisticated

and deceitful Other – the European. Rutherford suggests that we contextualise Winton's novel and Scully's "goodliness" within the discourses that rebuke Australia for not being more sophisticated. In response, Winton's sophisticated Other is immoral and has no empathy for his worldview. The implicit message is that if white Australians embrace European sensibilities it will be to the detriment of a predominantly male Australian selfhood. For Rutherford, the fear of losing the self to alterity touches a deep seated White Australian anxiety which has been central to a number of archetypal narratives – the white man deluged by foreigners who steal his right to honest labour, the pure woman at risk of insemination from an alien other and the new man threatened by evils of the Old World, for example. In *The Riders*, it is Jennifer who is a condensed version of those predatory figures. Structurally she is much like the feared Asian immigrant or the new feminist that threatens to steal male enjoyment. Interestingly, as Rutherford notes, Winton's aggressivity towards the sophisticated European Other has a much greater lineage in Australian literary culture.

According to Rutherford, the initial reception of Patrick White's writing by figures like A.D. Hope also illuminates the frame in which Australian literature *qua* Australian identity defines itself against a foreign other. From this perspective White's notoriously dense style – indicative for his critics of either a formless savagery or a contrived Europhilia – transgresses and contaminates the Australian ideal of clear, honest and realistic prose. Hope's aggressive attack on White is famously symptomatic of an aggression towards modernism. Modernism, like non-white immigration, was a dangerous and foreign contaminant which threatened the established relation between words and things. For the Australian Good then, the foreign is not simply different but deplorable. Aggression awaits that which cannot be contained within the frame of the Australian Good.

Rutherford's *The Gauche Intruder* is a brave and ambitious critique of the Australian moral code. Brave because it doesn't seek to point the finger at a single, monolithic and punitive Other but recognises the ubiquitous nature of hidden aggressivity in a variety of modalities. Rutherford names aggressivity in herself through autobiographical fragments, in literature and politics, and lastly, in the intellectual community at large where it is both pervasive and disavowed. Aggressivity is camouflaged behind knowledge. This book shows us just how much Lacanian psychoanalysis can teach the Australian intellectual community about the ethics of speaking well, which in psychoanalytic terms means to have "full speech": "Speech in which words are weighed for their meaning and their target . . . Speech, in short, that keeps its ends in view" (209).

Daniel Groenewald, University of Melbourne

Struggle and Storm:
The Life and Death of Francis Adams
Meg Tasker
Melbourne UP, 2001

Despite his relative obscurity today, Francis Adams once occupied a prominent position in the cultural life of late nineteenth century Australia. A poet, novelist, journalist, radical socialist and self-styled intellectual, Adams abandoned a cosmopolitan existence amongst the literary and artistic coteries of Paris and London to arrive in Australia in 1884. Over the following years he established a reputation as one of Australia's foremost social and political commentators, writing broadly in the local and English press and producing two volumes of essays investigating Australian cultural life entitled *Australian Essays* and *The Australians: A Social Sketch*, published in 1886 and 1893 respectively. Apart from his acute and incisive social analysis, Adams also wrote across a diverse range of other literary genres, completing fifteen books in his lifetime. Perhaps most famously these include the radical and controversial book of poetry *Songs of the Army of the Night* (1888), and – to contemporary readers who may have encountered the recent reprint by Text publishing – the detective story *Madeline Brown's Murderer* (1887). Both the range and sheer quantity of Adams' literary achievements were made even more extraordinary by the fact that he was only thirty when he died of pulmonary tuberculosis in 1893.

It is the theme of a short life, intensely lived, that imbues Meg Tasker's meticulously researched and fascinating biography of Adams with a kind of brooding urgency. Charting Adams's desperate travels in Australia and England and also to Egypt, China and Japan in a perpetual endeavour to ameliorate the symptoms of his disease, Tasker evokes a keen sense of her subject's restlessness and feverish productivity. Despite his awareness of the romantic archetype of the consumptive poet, Tasker demonstrates, Adams's day-to-day commitment to writing was driven by harsh economic necessity in a life often further complicated by personal tragedy. Regardless of circumstance, however, Adams remained an attractive and charismatic (though somehow darkly enigmatic) figure, who was remembered both for his physical beauty and magnetic charm. Such attributes – together with his intelligence and intense ambition – helped foster his friendships and associations with the leading literary figures of the time.

In her role as literary biographer Tasker adeptly manages the parallel narratives of life and work as they cyclically converge and separate, changing tempo before, once again, their rhythms unite. More than investigating Adams' literary works as a means to shed light on the character of the author or vice versa, however, Tasker focuses on the circumstances surrounding the production and reception of his writings. As a result, *Struggle and Storm* illuminates the cultural milieu in which Adams was participating – at a time of political and social flux and intensity subsequently viewed as a crucial period in Australia's history and literary development, and famously dubbed by Vance Palmer as "the legend of the nineties"(154). While remaining critically aware of the familiar po-

litical bigotries of the era – including the extreme racism and "masculinist" ethos that accompanied many nationalist ideals – Tasker situates Adams as an energetic and influential figure in defining and articulating the spirit of the age.

Shortly before he died, Adams explicitly requested that no attempt should be made to write the "inner history" (2) of his life, believing biographical accounts to be distorting or, at best, too "partial" to be meaningful. Tasker acknowledges that sense of partialness was especially daunting in Adams' case, due to the scarcity of personal information documenting his life. Apart from many years of scavenging for material, Tasker has sought to overcome the dearth of information by employing an experimental, "meta-biographical" (133) mode of writing. By splitting her narrative voice into different parts, she supplements the "official" version of events that adheres rigorously to the facts as they are known with a creative and speculative voice that extrapolates on information in a more relaxed way. Her casual alter ego explains:

> Even in a less academic genre such as biography, where one can lean back in the chair a bit, it's important to maintain scholarly rigour and accountability. So you'll find me butting in from time to time with off-the-record comments – but I can get away with it by using a different font can't I? (6)

On one level the strategy of using different voices enhances the already multivalent nature of the project. Tasker's decision to use direct quotation wherever possible works to animate Adams's world in an immediate way by juxtaposing the views and assumptions of those around him, a strategy that is especially successful, for example, in the section describing the circumstances surrounding his death. The dual-narrative approach adds yet another layer to that effect.

On another level, however, the less academic voice experiences the occasional identity crisis. Ranging in tone and content from lively asides, to gossip, to anecdotes concerning the research process and so on, the casual voice is also sometimes in danger of merging with the official voice. As both are entertaining and insightful, this doesn't really matter, only it raises the question of why separate them in the first place?

The answer lies in Tasker's anxieties about the status of literary biography as a genre and the erosion of the biographer's authority – particularly over recent decades. She wonders, quoting Romantic biographer Richard Holmes, how to "produce the living effect, while remaining true to the dead fact," noting also; "it's hard enough to find the dead facts, and the living effect that most biographers produce must be a combination of research and intuition, reconstruction and imagination" (4). While this discussion takes the form of a slightly anguished meditation on biographical authority, its ultimate function is – simply and appropriately – to candidly acknowledge the inevitability of a certain degree of creative licence and to recognize the limitations accompanying the textual reconstruction of any life. As Tasker notes elsewhere: "it's as well to be explicit" (4). But there is a sense in which her scrutiny of such issues seems motivated

by too great a concern to anticipate and field potential criticisms, especially when – as Tasker implicitly recognizes – the pitfalls she is rehearsing are not so unfamiliar.

At the same time, however, it is the very vigilance with which Tasker approaches the work that makes *Struggle and Storm* such a perceptive book. Not to mention her (contagious) passion for Francis Adams, for whom, as socialist and idealist more than poet or novelist, Tasker convincingly reserves – not an overblown position at centre stage – but a significant place in the history books.

Rachael Weaver, University of Melbourne

True History of the Kelly Gang
Peter Carey
U of Queensland P, 2001

Peter Carey's fiction is notable for its varied and highly designed discourses reflecting unique worlds – from the grey monosyllables of *The Fat Man in History* through the nineteenth century narrative frames of *Oscar and Lucinda*, Dickensian dialogues in *Jack Maggs* or the futuristic, techno-gymnastics of *The Unusual Life of Tristan Smith*. In all of them language is as important as physical setting. Given that the incentive for the *True History of the Kelly Gang* was the extant Jerilderie letter it is apt that this novel is tuned to echo and extend its distinctive voice.

True History of the Kelly Gang is shaped by Ned's replies to a collage of historical evidence and documentation. Employing an intimate register Carey orchestrates Ned's odd "parsing", limited vocabulary and distinctive speech patterns, to authorise his epistolary address to a daughter, the reader and the nation. Facts are mediated by "autobiographical" experience and the text commands attention as the testimonial of a condemned man, aiming to set the record straight. With a nod to the ways in which histories are constructed, a life is "parcelled" in thirteen episodic bundles of documents, pre-figured by details of acquisition and archival significance. But the real story lies beyond this and serves as an antidote to such evidence.

Investigating the distance between fact and fiction, history and truth, has long been an authorial preoccupation: *Illywhacker* was a 139 year old professional liar who narrated his life story to expose a pattern of historical lies in the recorded history of the nation, while *The Unusual Life of Tristan Smith* satirised cultural nationalism, the transnational media Sirkus industry and globalised cultural trends that re-shaped the world in the past decade. The title of this fiction as "True History" again puts the cat among the pigeons.

Carey is vitally concerned with the history/fiction nexus. His "Ned Kelly" refutes newspaper reportage and police documentation and his version of how things came about is addressed to a daughter who will need to know the "truth" of her legacy. Ned's faith in the word as a medium through which he justifies his actions is matched by

cynicism about the ways that truth may be manipulated. The letter and its call for justice is contextualized and framed by his lover's (Mary's) annotations. By filling in the gaps and silences in the historical record with this, intimate, family saga Carey problematises fact and legend.

Carey has consistently interrogated the "truths" of an era by having his protagonists embody the formative educational, religious or social influences of their changing times. *True History of the Kelly Gang* is such a book. While Ned re-lives his predicament, as an Irish boy born to convict parents in colonial Australia, Carey investigates the class and social circumstances that led to infamy, the notorious suit of armour and hanging. But most particularly, to the Jerilderie letter.

Carey has maintained an interest in the fate of little people opposing bureaucratic systems and his stories frequently depict contestations between vulnerable individuals and faceless authoritarian regimes. In *The Tax Inspector* he conducted a national "audit" of the ethical bases of Australian society in a profound indictment of the bad debts and corporate excesses of the 1980s. Ned's contest is with poverty, class, the law and ignorance: a struggle lost for complex personal reasons, but not without a fight, and therein lies Carey's tale. This is not *the story* that fuels the "national interest" in the outlaw and his deeds. Rodney Hall argues that:

> Storytelling is at the heart of human understanding. Who are we? How did we come to be here? Isn't this history? Not quite. From the community's point of view there is a problem with history. There's too much of it, because it includes everything we do. No nation on earth lives with its actual history. People take from it a selection of stories. Stories they are comfortable with. (Hall, R. "Being Shaped by the Stories We Choose from our History." 2001. 10 Jan. 2002 <http://www.abc.net.au/rn/deakin/stories/s295006.htm>)

Geoffrey Blainey illustrates the ways in which the Kelly story has been "selected" or appropriated:

> Ned Kelly first won national respect partly because his life was so exciting; his battle against the odds so effective at first. His story has been told again and again by filmmakers, historians, novelists and painters – Sidney Nolan helped Kelly's reputation after World War II and Peter Carey has written a fascinating novel based largely on his life. Ned will never lack modern-day companions. Initially his reputation was strong amongst a certain kind of small farmer, amongst miscellaneous battlers, critics of law and order and Irish Australians. This meant that many Protestants were wary of enthroning him. The decline of sectarian rivalry has widened Kelly's pool of sympathisers. (Geoffrey Blainey, Burton Lectures, ABC Radio Archives)

This is a novel about inheritance – the legacy of life's chances and Ned's place in Australia which works to destabilise and subvert the idea of there being "one" true history of either man or a country. Ned is an Irish boy in a British colony confronting the prejudices of class and the "stain" of convictism. Deemed different, on religious, linguistic and cultural grounds the Irish were a target for disaffected British soldiery and settlers. This gave rise to a rich legacy of songs/protests, stories of defiance and rebellion expressing resentment of persecution and alienation. Ned's among them and Carey confirms that being a Quinn or a Kelly is enough to determine one's lot in life. This puts a different complexion on Ned's obsession to protect the family's reputation against slander. Similarly, Mrs Kelly's attitudes to land are born from prior dispossession and her need to make a new start. Ned observes that:

> this debate about the Land Act were life or death and my mother enlisted her family who was presently our neighbours but in the midst of buying land far away in the North East. The Quinns were purchasing 1,000 acres at Glenmore on the King River they was Irish and therefore drunk with land and fancy horses all the old hardships soon to be forgotted. (19)

In the absence of a father, the love of the mother and wish to see her well-housed becomes a rationale for a dutiful son's on-going defence. Carey defuses Freudian mother/son implications by indicating that those who taunt Ned about his "mother-love" have little idea of the family's persecution in the colony. Ellen's spirited will to live and provide for her children makes her vulnerable to predatory men, another site of tension for her son.

The hint of transvestism in the Kelly legend is re-located as central as Carey has Mary explain to the ignorant assembled company the significance of this wearing of this "dress" in the Irish political context. The dangers inherent in transporting the vicious disharmony of Irish life to the "new" world of Australia are articulated as Mary explains the Sons of Sieve's role in her father's life. Ned further comments on the way such hatreds are perpetuated:

> Had we looked deep into Ben Gould we would have seen a familiar fury at the centre of his soul for though he were not Irish he carried the same sort of fire I mean the flame the Government of England lights in a poor man's guts every time they make him wear the convict irons. (179)

Carey gives us a flawed Irish/Australian hero whose obsession with "good name" and family loyalty fuels his notoriety.

This "villain's apprenticeship to Harry Power is a dubious privilege. Sold by his mother into service the job provides intimate knowledge of the Great Dividing Range area, new boots (temporarily), bush-ranging duties and inevitable encounters with the

law (by 15 he is imprisoned). Life on the run in the Wombat Ranges is exceedingly miserable and there is no romance in the bungled hold-ups and limited takings that come Power's way. The "young and gullible" (136) boy with a thirst for "Ali Baba" stories (and later *Lorna Doone*) is initiated with stories of "The Devil and Whitty" (a prophetic parable about crooked lawyers) but only develops expertise in ministering to Power's bunions and bowel disorders (96).

Ned finally learns of his mother's bargain with "this devil": "the son felt himself a mighty fool he'd been bought and sold like carrion" (103). Now an accomplice in the stealing of a watch and the horse of the magistrate's friend, he is not only marked for life but trapped when he declines to betray Power. In a further irony his family unjustly disown him and he is bound to this man whose lie, that he has killed Bill Frost, haunts his life. A more honest job with the traps leads to even greater trouble. Carey's Ned is a victim of circumstance who necessarily becomes more cunning. At the height of his servitude Ned observes:

> Yet the truth is neither a boy nor a horse and not even Harry Power can suppress it forever not with cunning or abuse not even with the great weight of his mighty arse. I got my first glimpse of the situation one morning as we travelled through McBean's Kilfeera Station on the way back to the Warby Ranges. (138)

The first memories of this child are the arrest of his uncle and the humiliation of his mother by the police. By the time he is eleven Ned is already disfigured by malicious slander about his father: "Sergeant O'Neil had filled my boy's imagination with thoughts that would breed like maggots on a summer day" (11). Subject to the "hateful reign" of the predominantly British police he is both defensive and belligerent. When the father dies, having taken the rap for Ned's killing of a beast to feed the family, Ned adds guilt to his formative emotional repertoire (12).

In Carey's view, Ned was a victim of a dubious legal system and a dysfunctional family. A reputation that was intact until Harry's arrest is shaken by the Quinn's slander and arrest after a further involvement with the law after the run-in with the McCormicks (183). At 17 he is briefly an ex-prisoner before being set up again for the theft of a horse and sent to Beechworth for three years hard labour. With George King ensconced at home, he takes a faller's job, and finds momentary fame as a boxer before his dealings with Dan lead to deliberate theft:

> Never having been a thief before I were surprised to discover what a mighty pleasure stealing from the rich could be. When it come the squatter's turn to suffer they could not bear their punishment they was immediately squealing like stuck pigs calling public meetings about the outrage while all the time I lived on their back door more than once sitting on my

> horse to watch McBean eat tea & when his dogs was going wild he could do not more than stare out into the wild colonial dark. He did not own that country he never could. (221)

Carey reveals the poverty of the law's so-called protection of its people as the police with their complex web of allegiances use Ned as a pawn in a much larger game.

Ned is also an innocent in the business of love. Having identified with John Ridd's fight against injustice but not yet met his Lorna Doone, Ned is ripe and Cons Fitzpatrick is the devious agent who introduces Ned to Mary Hearn. This is ill-fated as Mary is already (at 17) the mother of George's child, the same George who is Ned's mother's husband. Ned's rage at the discovery of this double treachery reaches monumental proportions and this trauma, followed by Cons Fitzpatrick's deception of Kate, ends in a shooting, Mrs Kelly's arrest (265), the attempt to kill the Kelly boys and the murders at Stringybark Creek. Fitzpatrick's intrusion into the Kelly's lives is disastrous.

Ned is increasingly embroiled in events spiralling out of control and forced to invent options on the run. He assures Mary that: "I would never kill no-one unless I had to" (296) but the "gang" cross a line with the police killings. Ned pointedly rejects Steve Hart's mournful singing in the old language with the claim that "we [will] write our own damned history from here on" (279) but his attempt to tell his "truth" is suppressed.

Events cannot be undone but Ned's obsession to publish the "real" story grows. This is consistent with the psychological disposition of the man Carey "creates" and by parcel 10 his-story is commenced, stimulated by news of the circularised version of the killings defining brutality and mutilation by "Irish Madmen" (296). Ned learns of the questions raised by Cameron about police conduct and his call for "reliable information" inspires hope (299). Mary's wish for the tale recorded for the child she is carrying is affirmed with Ned's claim that the child "was [my] future right away from that moment you was my life" (301). To then be tricked out of your story, your essential rights, by a printer – who promises to write it because you are not a literate man – is a further injustice.

When Ned receives a message from his imprisoned mother (just his name, written) he is trapped in a new way (325). Carey reveals a major "misunderstanding" as Mary makes plans for an American escape after the robbery while Ned plans to rescue his mother. Ned is bound by his dual allegiance while Mary is liberated by hers. Rodney Hall has claimed that:

> The search to uncover Truth is a lifelong quest affecting everybody. We all feel it. Nobody can escape, let alone abandon, the quest. This is no less than a search for the story at the heart of experience, at the heart of our knowledge and our confusion. The story of our loves and disappointments, our grief and our happiness. It governs whom we trust, how we behave, and what we do with our lives.

Kelly's quest for a better life led to his execution at 25 but the utopian dream of democracy and justice in a "new" Australian Society was shared by many. The Jerilderie letter is an important document as a statement of individual rights and Carey's novel dignifies the life that the legend "overtook".

Carey has regularly examined different kinds of addictions: self-dramatisation, telling lies, emotional dependence or obsessive fears to analyse paradigms of national identity. He is interested in the manner in which we invent, construct, or come to believe in particular "truths" and has used his narratives to report on the condition of the nation. As the society again lurches to the right, refuses the rights of outsiders or apologies to Indigenous people while celebrating the demise of its last Gallipoli diggers who fought for a king who blithely put them in the firing line, Ned's story seems salutary.

Lyn Jacobs, Flinders University

Chain Letters:
Narrating Convict Lives
Lucy Frost and Hamish Maxwell-Stewart, eds
Melbourne UP, 2001

This is the first occasion on which I have been asked to review a book I did not thoroughly enjoy reading. The source of my discontent, as this review will show, is the general "problem" of academic publishing in Australia and the response to that "problem" which *Chain Letters* represents. So my difficulties lie not with any single contribution, nor with the editors' project, but with all of us, writers, publishers, and readers alike.

Each of the chapters in *Chain Letters* aims to recover the biography of an individual convict, or group of convicts, from a range of sources usually considered too scanty, too "official" or too "numerical" to bear much fruit, or too personal to be of much general interest. It is a project, as editors Lucy Frost and Hamish Maxwell-Stewart note, arising from the successful "Colonial Eye" conference in Hobart in 1999, and the consequent formation of an "International Centre for Convict Studies". Scholars associated with this project redress a general absence of individual convict voices in the "grand narrative" of Australian history, or even (as the editors note in their final chapter) in the displays at the Port Arthur Museum. Certainly this volume indicates the enormous potential the tracing of individual histories has to offer our understanding of Australia's historical and contemporary culture. And *Chain Letters* maintains the emphasis on the racial, national, social, and political diversity of the convicts which characterises other recent work in the area. By focusing on individuals this volume attempts to sketch human faces into an entire phase of European Australian history. Given the marked absence of convicts from the pageantry of Sydney's Olympic Opening Ceremony, it is perhaps timely to remind Australians of their many convict forebears as "real" human beings if not historical icons.

Some contributions to the anthology succeed in piecing together a speculative "life" by either a meticulous chasing of names through numerous lists, or by offering "likely" scenarios pilfered from an awareness of general social and economic changes in particular localities. All are conscious of the tentative nature of this enterprise, and most give accounts of the frustrations associated with the process of constructing lives from the archives. But by far the most successful of the contributors employ the more traditional methodology of reading sources as subject to historically specific generic conventions and molded to the expectations of their first readers. In one such stand-out contribution, Hamish Maxfield-Stewart refers to the "search" for readers as "a more profitable task" than seeking to authenticate texts, and the results in his chapter are fascinating, helping to identify a particular narrative as specifically addressed to other convicts.

Unfortunately this "more profitable task" is far from generally heeded. Too often contributors became bogged down attempting to discover an emotional "truth" motivating the texts under scrutiny. Whole paragraphs of questions offer suggestions about what the convict was "feeling" without duly appreciating that "feelings" are also historically and class specific. The "feeling" of this volume's convicts sometimes emerges in the rhetoric of contemporary therapy. For example, while a Presbyterian clergyman is condemned for framing an ex-convict woman's story as a melodramatic romance, "drowned in literary cliché", the new frame reads like an application for stress leave: "*The pressure on Adelaide must have been intense*, and if she was not the victim of dastardly aristocrats, as Cameron would have it, *she undoubtedly felt the crushing power of forces beyond her control*" (italics mine).

Undoubtedly? Another contributor displaces nineteenth-century sentiment with an instinctive wail: "This was not the mawkish language of melodrama but a searing *cri de coeur* from a woman who loved her husband and feared for her children." The mother's "searing *cri de coeur*" is best left to *A Current Affair*; the "truth" of each convict's personal pain is lost to his or her historical moment. Better to attempt decoding the discourse in which the convict narratives are framed, to persist in learning the language of the historical document in question (romance, record, petition . . .) in order to unlock the "truth effects" which the writer or speaker was aiming at. To take up the latter example, we should rather say that the woman deliberately mobilised the language of melodrama to serve her own ends. This both illuminates the text and permits its author the intellectual agency of a political strategy.

Generally speaking, although this book contains some excellent and exciting material, the prose is too often padded and purple where it should be analytical and to the point. Some places in the text sink to outright sentimentalism: "Poor Henry, such a short life, and almost all of it spent incarcerated." While this might pass for passion and style, the tendency to impose contemporary sympathies on historical subjects is more troublesome when seeking individuals' motives. Ellen Cornwall is charged with stealing a blanket from her master:

> Had she been working for little more than room in her master's house where she looked after her baby and plied her needle? Was it as a live-in worker that she stripped linen from her bed and pawned or sold it to buy something for Henry – food, clothes, medicine? Or was she trapped in outwork . . . where she made hats for which Wallis paid a pittance? Did she arrive one day to find him absent, leave her hats and take the bedding which at least might keep her warm? Was the theft an impulsive act of defiance against a master who would have no trouble identifying the culprit? Retaliation for a dispute over money promised and unpaid? So many questions, so few answers.

Perhaps the "many questions" yield "so few answers" because they are the wrong questions. After all, the proliferation of motives quoted above obscures their homogeneity: all sentimentalise Ellen Cornwall as victim. What if this convict were simply a nasty piece of work? A woollen blanket was an expensive and precious item. Was her master that wealthy himself? Contrast the contributor's one-sided uncertainty with the decisiveness of historical contemporaries judging a different prisoner: "Although there was no material evidence to link him to the theft . . . it took the jury only half an hour to convict him." So by all means appreciate the social conditions determining people's "criminal" actions, but analyse them as creatures of their historical moment, not as victims in need of our emotional advocacy today. The editors note at the end of the volume: "We face the charge of speaking for convicts in our latter-day middle-class voices", countering the charge with the assertion that "no order can be imposed on the past except within the historical consciousness of the present." And yet it is a lack of historical consciousness, of sensitivity to the difficult languages of the archive, which causes the problems in this volume, problems which occur precisely in the places where analysis is squeezed out by purple prose.

Is it coincidental that the most successful contributions deliver findings in the most "academic" style, disputing former scholarship and convict historiography in the course of their textual analysis? The least successful contributions collapse under the weight of speculation, simply relay primary material, fill in the gaps with postmodern fiction, or compensate a deficiency of material with a "romance" of scholarly research. The latter, taking us through the process of mining the archives, alienates the specialist reader for simply expending words on the quotidian duties of her or his own work. And the most common result when we are launched straight into primary material is simply confusion as to what the chapter is about: in some of the contributions, an introduction of sorts appears only in the last few paragraphs. This is certainly an unhelpful strategy for students scanning library copies for specific information.

In fact this is a volume which deliberately distances itself from an academic readership, and the key lies in the editors" introduction but also in an insightful paper given by Teresa Pitt. Pitt is the commissioning editor for Melbourne University Press and her

paper, "Referees' Decision: Academic Publishing", was recently published in the proceedings of ASAL's July 2000 conference. Pitt illuminates the pressures on MUP emanating variously from the dominance of multinational publishing houses, Australia's minuscule scholarly book market, distribution nightmares, Melbourne University's desire to make its press a profitable enterprise, and an absence of tertiary sector funding. The paper suggests that MUP desperately needs to "increase the readership" of its publication list, and the way to do so is to "broaden" the market, "to bridge the gap between academia and the wider community", to make academic work "accessible to educated general readers". Academics must come "down from the ivory towers and into the market place", and to do so they must "change the way they write":

> Instead of the traditional academic style, we want to encourage people to write in a more accessible, open way, using a more relaxed, direct, conversational style, and to help them find and use their own unique and personal "voice". I don't want dry impersonality; I want a text that is argumentative and opinionated. I want this caring, this excitement, to come through on the page and to communicate itself to the reader. I want work that is written with passion and style.

Chain Letters is permeated with this "more relaxed, direct, conversational style"; the final chapter even poses as an actual conversation. The publisher's marketing agenda is also evidenced in Frost's and Maxfield-Stewart's reassurance that nothing like dry impersonal jargon-filled academic writing will be found in their volume:

> For our academic readers, the theoretical issues embedded within the specifics of narrating are signaled in the notes. We have tried to keep specialised language out of our prose, because we have enjoyed the detective work involved in research, and we want to share the pleasures of the chase.

In the context of Pitt's paper it is hard not to read this extract as an "Academia Keep Out" notice, particularly when the "notes" in this volume turn out to be simple references. You will look in vain for any footnote commentary engaging in "the theoretical issues embedded within the specifics of narrating". Meanwhile, over and over again a theoretical "issue" is indeed "signaled" in the main body of the prose, but left hanging, while we set off again on the well-worn "pleasures of the chase".

In this light the placing of "introductions" at the end of chapters suggests the subordination or even evasion of one of the most useful and difficult of academic tasks: the positioning of material within the context of contemporary intellectual debates. One context is conspicuous by its absence. This volume could have offered insight into "unofficial" interactions between convicts and Aboriginal people: escaped convicts who joined or fought with Aboriginal tribes, or who were assigned near or even in Aborigi-

nal missions. These would have made interesting figures to select for re-narration, an important contribution to post colonial discourse otherwise ignored.

To whom is this volume addressed if not to the academic reader? The back cover refers to each "chapter as a mini detective story", but it is a post modern detective story which ends in so much explicit uncertainty. The sentimental might find it appealing that these "moving accounts . . . demonstrate the perennial importance of love and hope". For the less "mawkish" it is true these are "important cultural texts that help to create an understanding of "who we are", but that sounds like something studied at a dry and impersonal university. *For the Term of His Natural Life* is mentioned as bait for the adventurous, but that is a case in point. Marcus Clarke's name is misspelled (without the 'e'), and the long title (also used within the volume) is the unauthorised one which appeared only after Clarke's death: pedantic maybe, but this is a work concerned with the representation of convict narratives. One group to whom an appeal is not made is genealogists. Far from the exclusive haunt of professional historians, archive offices are mostly peopled by men and women seeking out their family trees. This volume does show how brilliantly and excitingly dull rolls of microfilm records can suddenly burst forth with information. But perhaps genealogists are too specialised and tiny an audience. Perhaps they are even worse than academics.

Unfortunately it is difficult to imagine *any* "educated general readers" who would pick up and enjoy this volume. In the bookshop most have not ventured past the groaning shelves of traditional biography. Any who made it beyond the back-cover blurb of this anthology would probably founder in the creative-writing-course prose of the first contribution. Instead it is professional historians and students of Australian culture who are most likely to want this book, not only in its six weeks in Angus and Robertson's but in its decades in the library stack. Yet it is this reader who is short changed, indeed disdained, by the publisher's agenda. The editors, meanwhile, are offered criticism like this in place of rising sales: this review becomes part of the "problem". And the contributors also come off second best. Unless specifically directed, the occasional astonishing absence of analysis of quoted material seems unfathomable from contributors of such standing. Indeed it is this absence which the book's illustrations illustrate: most are not referred to directly in the text, none has a "figure" number, none is "read" as a work of art whose conventions might illuminate something about convicts in the context of this volume. The pictures merely sell.

My concern is that we are witnessing the displacement of one type of conversation, centred on the profession of Academe, by another, cosier, perhaps even more one-sided chat. But it is the academic conversation which is the really difficult one, the politically challenging one, the one which is "direct" but never "relaxed". It is the one where passion truly lies. I concede that theoretical texts are well served by some simplification of language. Jennifer Rutherford's *The Gauche Intruder* (2000), another Pitt-sponsored MUP publication, includes complex explications of psychoanalytic theory and textual analysis of primary sources rendered lucid by careful language. In contrast where his-

torical primary material is as fascinating as that presented in *Chain Letters* a certain accessibility is inbuilt. Meanwhile the scarcity or scantiness of the texts scrutinised calls for *more* close, theoretically- and historically-informed analysis, not less. And it is the very innovation of the work's methodology which calls for a more detailed account of its historiographical context and effect.

Chain Letters represents one response to the "problem" of university-sponsored books in the Australian market place. But it is an economic rationalist response to the "problem" wherein the "problem" is itself formulated according to economic rationalism, a response that will probably fail nonetheless by both the rationalist's and the academic's standards (Pitt's unenviable dilemma). So as with the *Chain Letters* project itself, failure to answer might demand different questions. Rutherford, for example, allows us to formulate the "problem" of academic publishing differently when she couples Australia's xenophobic aggression with hostility to intellectual theories deemed "foreign". Her countermove is to conclude in praise of difficult texts. Reading these two "answers" alongside one another, placing two MUP publications side by side, this academic sides with the latter. Rutherford, after all, makes a case for something other than a conversational style, for pleasures which take us out of the relaxed and comfortable lounge rooms of a desired but mythical "general reader".

Ian Henderson, University of Sydney

Collected Poems
John Forbes
Brandl and Schlesinger, 2002

John Forbes. The name is already a legend. (Big, scruffy bloke on a clapped out bike, wheeling his way around Carlton, trailing clouds of Sydney, making his living (!) as a poet: 'send me your poems to look at, why don't ya?'). He would have hated that fact, and loved it – being a legend, the consummate poets' poet, and a regular, daggy kind of guy who could never quite get things together – and didn't actually believe, somehow, in getting things together. "e.g. 'Minor / poet, conspicuously dishonest', would look funny / on a plaque screwed to a tree" ("The Age of Plastic" 137).

John Forbes' poetry is an amalgam of innocence and sophistication. There is self-doubt, angst, self-deprecation, the loser, the mimic, the know-it-all, the druggy, assisted by humour, irony, satire; and there is the poignancy of a lyrical gift opening up so many unsayable, moving, uneasy visions:

> *for a moment I felt* le sang des poètes
> *– Tonight Show version –*
> *coursing through me, natively brilliant*

> *& removed completely from that inertia*
> *you cancel your career with.* ("Serenade" 136)

The early poetry, 1970–1979, taken mainly from his first collection *Tropical Skiing*, is fascinating in its youthful virtuosity. Its mentors, Frank O'Hara and John Ashbery, are worn on the sleeve, so to speak, and it's actually refreshing to see the love and wonderfully creative mimicry of one young poet for other poets he is discovering, re-discovering and honouring. But there's always the transformation too, from the American voices to the Australian vernacular. But how do Americans read "On the Beach: A Bicentennial Poem"? Depends on the American I suppose. And it depends on the Australian reader too. Not all literary critics love Forbes – for example the one who leapt gratefully on his poem about Iraq, because "it was one of the few of his I understood". We are dealing here with a poet who puts language and the vagaries, puns, wisdoms, alienations, and beauty of language first. It's language, place and self – the weird permutations and aspirations of the self in the throes of making and unmaking – which Forbes uses to form such bizarre, cryptic, beautiful and angst-making pacts with readers.

So it is first of all Sydney which places Forbes, in the position of a stunned mullet; Sydney inspected by "Alan Bond's belly coloured airship". The Sydney where "images don't change / beneath a varnish that embalms disgust" ("Sydney Harbour Considered as a Matisse" 186); the Sydney of boyhood, adolescence, sex and drink and drugs, and spentness: "it becomes you / like a tinsel landscape the way false doors / wobble & bang in the traffic lights. / You are the beautiful, rigged summers / that glow with Vaseline / frenzied but safe from sweating like a movie, / a close-up of afternoons that dazzle / blue with / the fragile descent of parachutes, transistors / giggling at the silly fates" ("A Floating Life" 38). Place and self merging, refusing to disentangle themselves in words.

But it's also Melbourne, second place, where self-administered advice amounts to: "'Be a caricature, / John, and not a cartoon, if you want to lose / your nostalgia for the sensual, glaring sun!'" ("Melbourne"153). These places are not the Melbourne and Sydney of the town planner, but rather the bleak, funny, transmogrifying landscapes of the self trying to outwit itself. In "Lessons for Young Poets", under the heading "(love)", young poets are advised to:

> *continually disappoint*
> *the expectations of others,*
> *this way you will come to hate yourself*
> *& they will be charmed by your distress* (167)

Along with love, and fulfilment, the suburbs also do not come off well. Sobriety too is something you would barely consider between bouts of language, drink, loneliness, sarcasm, disdain, surfing and illness. Female beauty is also a diversion of a major kind. Usually unattainable, usually a metaphor for unattainability. And poetry only makes

all that unattainability worse: poetry / ludicrous sex-aid greasing the statues of my mind" ("Ode/Goodbye Memory" 54). Foreign countries too are broached, wandered and similied across, always in Australian drag: "knocked out by what convinced me / Great Art" without inverted commas is / (but not because of this) I hung around / with other Australians & hit the piss" ("Europe: A Guide for Ken Searle" 119).

And the lot of it – poetic vocation, politics, the state of the nation, the self, love, poet— can be seen as "in fact a cunning mechanical contrivance, / like Bob Hawke's hair" ("The Stunned Mullet" 124). Hope is steeped up around art, and words, but always with a tart, sideways look of disbelief, or awkwardness, or the realisation of futility. This is the poet of the "casual eschatology" who always hoped for more:

> *I think I should write*
> *more detailed poems about trees, or*
> *tracts of reasonably clean water, maybe*
> *the exact delineation of a marble layer cake*
> *underneath a doily on the porch, not because*
> *I can do it well*
> *but more as a general anti-dust routine*
> *where you wipe the grime off your hand*
> *& kiss it etcetera etcetera, as if one day*
> *all this sort of stuff won't make you laugh,*
> *that once you thought*
> *its day-to-day terror would equal change* ("Self-portrait with cake"135)

And there you have it, really: the wit, the innocence wryly recalled, the craft. And the longing. What you're left with are a thousand reasons to laugh, and hope. But in what exactly? Perhaps change was too much to expect, though Forbes did change the language. And he enriched lives, through his steely, awkward pyrotechnicality of self-making. He had, after all the demurrings, a will to be the ageless poet in an age of jet planes, satellites, transitory relationships and failures, where:

> *death by stellar*
> *allure or a lack of oxygen might follow,*
>
> *unless this prayer can save me, the way*
> *damaged glamour seeks out its opposite number*
>
> *& we move together, draped in the planet's*
> *tingling aurora, thanks to our huge,*
> *electric shoes.* ("Satellite of Love" 191)

Lyn McCredden, Deakin University

A Certain Style: Beatrice Davis, A Literary Life
Jacqueline Kent
Viking, 2001

"There are no lions in India," wrote Beatrice Davis to Henrietta Drake-Brockman in 1956, in a list of editorial queries about the latter's manuscript novel *The Wicked and the Fair*. "Shall we let this pass as a traveller's tale, or change to tiger?"

Anyone who has ever copy-edited anything will know that the range of skills required of a good editor is broader and more heterogeneous than any duty statement could possibly convey. Among other things, one needs sufficient general knowledge to win a bundle on *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?*, which of course would obviate the need to settle for the pittance that book editors get paid in the first place. When Beatrice Davis was widowed at thirty-six by her charming but tubercular doctor husband, he left her in a financial position that made a salary unnecessary, but she remained in her job as General Editor for Angus and Robertson in Sydney from the time she joined them in 1937 through her husband's death in 1945 – "not long before the invention of the streptomycin that could have saved him" – until she was sacked by Richard Walsh in 1973. Even then, at the age of sixty-four, she chose from among several offers, moved to Thomas Nelson and went on working. It wasn't about the money; it was about the work.

Beatrice Davis was the most acclaimed and feted book editor in the history of Australian writing. During her decades with A&R she worked with some of the best and/or best-known Australian writers of the twentieth century, many of whom became and stayed close friends, including Miles Franklin, Douglas Stewart, Thea Astley and Hal Porter. She was much-loved and much-feared, often both at once. She initiated, with Douglas Stewart, the annual anthologies of Australian verse and stories, *Australian Poetry* and *Coast to Coast*. She was on the judging committee of the Miles Franklin Award from its inception in 1957 till her death in 1992. The first and only other book about her, a 47-page memoir published by her friend Anthony Barker in 1991, is called *One of the First and One of the Finest*. The Literature Board of the Australia Council confers in alternate years an award called the Beatrice Davis Editorial Fellowship, funding a 12-week attachment to a US publishing house or houses for an Australian editor to broaden her or his knowledge and experience of the editor's craft.

While she is mainly remembered for her work with fiction writers, Davis also worked, like most editors, for much of the time on the bread-and-butter non-fiction and utility books with which publishers keep literature afloat: books with titles like *Sheep Management and Diseases* ("it sold for a guinea and, this being the price of one sheep at the time, was a bargain") and *The Australian Blood Horse*, which was the 1956 Australian Book of the Year and was known to the A&R editorial staff as "The Australian Bloody Horse". Davis trained her editorial staff in-house and was, as Kent describes her, "a guide, mentor and teacher to her staff . . . in effect the leader of a craft guild."

Davis was a colourful and complex character given to racy habits, gossip-inducing behaviour and quotable remarks. The book contains some memorable vignettes: there's the story of the thin strapless dress under which she wore Band-Aids over her nipples and then had to ask her hostess to rip them off at the end of the evening, too squeamish to do it herself; there's the story of her tottering out into her own lounge room one morning, beautifully dressed but clearly suffering a vicious hangover, and asking a visitor to put her earrings in for her. "Some people who knew Beatrice well," says Kent in this lucid, well-researched, and – for scholars of Australian literary history – essential biography, "have said that nothing she did would surprise them." Davis's longstanding role as an editor means that most of the many people who remember her are or were literary types who were inclined to write things down. Between those written records and the number of people who are still alive and remember Davis well, Kent has had a wealth of material to draw on for her book.

In an era when Australian biography has seen a number of heroic achievements of various kinds – Brian Matthews' *Louisa*, Drusilla Modjeska's *Poppy*, David Marr's beautifully written and monumental book on Patrick White, Brenda Niall's recent book on the Boyd family and its houses – Kent is content with a methodologically modest approach to her subject. The overall structure is loosely chronological, within which some chapters digress to focus on particular writers with whom, or with whose work, Davis had a particularly close or long-lasting relationship: within the framework of Davis's own life story there are separate chapters on Ernestine Hill, Eve Langley, Miles Franklin, the husband-and-wife team of Ruth Park and D'Arcy Niland, Hal Porter, and Xavier Herbert. Kent has worked for many years as an editor herself and her style is at once informal and highly literate; she tells stories in an even-handed, warm-hearted way.

The beautiful design of this book makes full use of Davis's legendary elegance and charm; there she is on the back cover, sashaying stylishly towards the camera (though her gaze is off to one side) and bearing a disconcertingly close resemblance to Kylie Minogue: petite of stature and delicate of bone, with big hooded eyes, waif cheekbones, prominent jawbone and pixie chin, wearing a skirt of enviable cut and carrying a dinky little handbag like a miniature attache case. On the front cover is a haunting, mask-like close-up of finely moulded features and peach-bloom skin in sepia, with a penetrating gaze – straight at the camera, this time – and a perfectly made-up half-smile; however fairylike she may have been, this is not a woman you'd want to run into up a dark alley if she had anything against you. Richard Walsh is a brave man.

Patrick White disliked her and referred to her as "Beatrice Davis, B.A."; this was meant to imply that she belonged in his benighted ranks of third-rate Australian thinkers with pretensions, the "journalists and schoolmasters" who "rule what intellectual roost there is". (White, of course, was a B.A. himself.) Considering their shared love of music, sex and alcohol, it might be thought that they would have got on rather better. But far from being the kind of intuitive woman that White liked, Davis was rational, quizzical, sardonic, hard-edged, ladylike and socially adept ("refained", he called her),

so perhaps she simply reminded him of his mother – just as she reminded Richard Walsh of his former headmistress. "Beatrice looked at Walsh," says Kent: and saw a shaggy-haired young man who thought he knew it all; Walsh looked at Beatrice and saw the purse-lipped, conservative representative of a bygone generation.

So he may have, and he may have had good reason; Davis could be high-handed and icy, while her insistence on referring to editors collectively as "he" when nearly all of them were women, and her failure to see anything ludicrous in being named Bookman of the Year for 1977, gives an indication of her automatic resistance to certain kinds of change (she was born in 1909, after all). But at the other end of her formidable emotional range, she was capable of great generosity of spirit, as one of the stories about her friendship with Miles Franklin makes clear. "Brent of Bin Bin" was a pseudonym used for a series of novels by Franklin, who believed, quite wrongly, that this was a secret. "In all her dealings with Miles about these books," says Kent:

> Beatrice followed the convention that Miles Franklin and Brent of Bin Bin were two different people . . . Years later she wrote that she never had the nerve to tell Miles she thought her guilty of pointless deception. "She could have had reasons that were important to her, and I loved her too much to upset her."

Like Hilary McPhee's recent autobiography *Other People's Words*, this book's real topic is the female subject's intellectual development and working life, and her contribution to the public culture. As with McPhee's book (and McPhee is in many ways a comparable character, in her talents, her charisma, and her long-standing and pervasive influence in Australian literary life), Kent's biography of Davis does not separate the private and public lives, but shows unobtrusively how they were juggled, and the ways in which, from time to time, the one took its toll on the other.

Kerryn Goldsworthy, Adelaide