

**Australian Women's Book Review**

**Volume 16.1 (2004)**



Detail from Eileen Halley 'Utopia'

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**ISSN:** 1033 9434

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## Woman of the End Times

2004. Face it: like most baby-boomers, you're well over the hill. Born between 1946 and 1960, you're an infinitesimal part of that unsightly bulge in the middle of the demographic charts. You work as a teacher, an editor, a nurse, a PA, an accountant, a journalist. Those sorts of occupations.

Studies show you spend 3.5 hours a day on the internet, mostly reading and writing emails. You attend a time management course in which you are told to allow only half an hour per day, and to download and reply to all emails in one go. You try it, but you only last a week. They're just too tempting, those unopened envelope icons lined up neatly, seducing you to click them open at every dull moment of your life.

You sponsor a little girl in Bangladesh through World Vision. You search the internet for information on how you can write letters to refugees in detention.

Despite all this, sleeping stops being easy. Some nights you spend the whole time scratching first one itch, then another. If you drink coffee or wine after 5 p.m., things are even worse. Some nights you are kept awake by your own heartbeat. Even smoking grass no longer relaxes you. It just makes your heart beat faster, louder... You lie there staring wide-eyed into the darkness, wondering how many more hours of the monotonous drumbeat you have to endure. You make a mental note to finally give in and to ask your GP for sleeping pills. Yet look what happened to Aunt Mary. She was guzzling half a dozen a night by the end, as she'd become so used to them they had little effect. But it's either that or HRT, you tell yourself. Then again, you don't want to become an 'oestrogenised husk', as that Germaine Greer was reported to have said a few years back.

December 28 2003. You turn fifty. Some of your friends have begun their retirement. They've sold up and moved to the coast, where they work on their watercolours or their handicap. Those who stay in town embark on a last, extravagant extension to their home. If you call on them, they pull out the plans and pore over them, describing every last detail for you: the Italian marble benchtops, the home movie theatre. You get stuck into their Chardonnay and clamp your mouth shut over the yawns.

October 10 2002. In Bali, the favourite holiday destination of everyone in Australia from teenagers to baby-boomers, the Sari nightclub in Kuta is bombed. 202 people are killed: 88 Australians, 38 Indonesians, 23 Britons, nine Swedes, seven Americans, six Germans, four Dutch, and three New Zealanders. The remaining 24 people were from 13 other countries. At the memorial ceremony in Canberra the Australian Prime Minister John Howard asks everyone to think of the Australians, Britons and Americans killed.

You can't believe what you are hearing. Surely there is no longer any doubt that the world has gone completely mad.

September 11 2001. 'Attack on America' the headlines scream. All day long, the television stations re-run footage of the two airliners ploughing into the twin towers of the World Trade Centre in New York. All day long, your head seethes with confusion and questions: why? how many dead? who? al-qaeda? how? suicide bombers? bin who? how many survivors? Muslims? terror? war?

By evening your tears come. For those crushed, burnt alive, leaping from the buildings, for your depressed mother, your chronically ill partner, for the baby you had to abort, for the African children dying of AIDS, for your best friend who killed herself at 35, for your cousin's baby born disabled. For everything.

Your brother says: The US will waste several Arab countries in return for this. Wait and see. Afghanistan, Iraq. Iran. Syria.

It's been three days now, and the crying won't stop.

At the end of the week you hear Myer is offering 20% discount if you buy two Country Road items. If you add in your shareholder discount that makes a saving of nearly a third. You disguise your swollen eyes with makeup and go and buy a pair of aubergine pants with a silver pinstripe, and a purple silk shirt to match. At least the crying has stopped.

December 28 2000. You awaken late on your forty-seventh birthday, your first in the new millennium. The weight of this dual significance squats like an incubus above you, pressing the stuffy bedroom air heavily onto your face. Yellow sunlight spills around the sides of the curtains like unwanted visitors. You live in Melbourne, a city of four million on the south coast of that large island continent called Australia, a city where half a century ago a film was made about the end of the world.

But the end of the world has not yet come, despite global warming, the irregular but frequent testing of nuclear bombs at various points around the globe, the erasure of ninety percent of the world's trees, and your mother's repeated warning that the End Times Are Nigh And You Should Repent Before It's Too Late.

This thought drives you to wriggle deeper under the doona to block out the sunlight and with it the day that speeds you ever closer to your own end, if not the world's.

Then you remember: Eve has invited you over tonight and has promised you a special meal and a massage. You cannot help it: a smile pulls at the corners of your lips and next thing you are in the shower under the too-hot needles with your mouth open and water trickling in to meet your laugh. You rub yourself with pure lavender soap. Everywhere. Eve says she loves how it makes your skin taste.

1997. Princess Diana dies. You feel strangely moved, although you don't admit this to anyone. In the supermarket queues you grab the women's magazines and read the articles about her, furtively, hoping no one who knows you will see.

On the evening of the funeral, you have planned to go to a concert in the city. You are programming the video-recorder just as Eve comes in the door. 'Do you know how many thousands have been massacred in Algeria this week? she asks. You do not know; you feel guilty. 'Come on, or we'll be late,' says Eve, sighing, as she gently takes your hand.

1996. It's the final seminar of the year and afterwards you join some of your colleagues and postgraduate students at a restaurant. Sitting next to you is that smartarse who's always using words you have to look up: *labile*, *abscission*, *deuteragonist*. You have given her As for her papers, grudgingly. Her name is Eve. You know her thesis topic is the relationship between words and quantum

physics. You're glad you won't be the one who has to supervise it. She tries to explain her ideas to you, but you have had too much wine and her words slide through your mind, taking no foothold. You are not sure why, but you find yourself simultaneously repelled and attracted by her.

Driving home at midnight you wish you had not drunk so much of that Chenin Blanc. Between cold sheets you stretch out diagonally, the bed feeling larger than ever. In what seems to be the middle of the night, with the darkness deep and thick and palpable, you sense a presence in the bed.

It is Eve. Her skin is soft and cool against you, her mouth is on yours, and then everywhere. You are floating, floating... Then the electric current sears through the middle of your body up to your heart, more quickly than ever before. And then she is gone. You awake to the silvery pre-dawn light and your own thumping heart.

1995. Alone for years now, you have become so self-sufficient it scares you. You wouldn't fall in love these days if you were paid to. It's an active verb, right? Like reading or walking. You can choose whether or not you do it.

You meet your daughter for lunch in the café at the Botanical Gardens. She towers over you. So much for genes; it must be all the hormones they put in the meat.

You feel sad to think of the baby you had to let go. He or she would be five now, barely at school. But you could not have kept working full-time, obtained higher degrees, risen in your field, become independent...

1993. Your daughter is offered a place in the course she chose: at a university in a provincial town an hour's drive away. 'It's time I left home anyway,' she says. You don't feel nearly as sad as you expected.

1990. You notice your husband no longer meets your eye, nor kisses you on the mouth. You assume it's because you're both working too hard. One day he says accusingly, 'You're never happy anymore.' You think... Well, now that you mention it...

When he says he's leaving, you help him pack.

1989. One month your period doesn't come. You wonder if this is menopause starting early. Or...

When you tell him he shouts at you: 'But you said you were on the bloody pill. We can't possibly have another. Anyway, you're too old, it'll be retarded. You better do something.'

'I am on the pill,' you say, hearing your voice as if from far away. 'The doctor said this happens sometimes.'

You do something.

1988. The drug Prozac is put on the market, and is quickly used by millions, not just for clinical depression, but because most humans can only endure life with chemical assistance. You are glad your mother has found religion, just in time. But what will you use?

Your cousin visits, from interstate. Her eyes are duller than you remember, her movements strangely slow, although she is only two years older than you. Over Italian coffee in Lygon Street, she says, 'Why is marriage such an endless cold war?' You think, what an apt phrase, why didn't I think of that myself? You have no answer for her.

1986. At work you gain a promotion. 'That's very nice,' says your mother on the telephone, 'but you must understand that earthly rewards are not what I am interested in hearing about. You realise that the world as we know it is winding down? The Bible says quite clearly that it will burn up like a parchment, and the new Jerusalem will take its place. We are definitely in the End Times, and after this there will be a new millennium when the Lord will come to reign over His people. In the final seven years of that millennium, Satan will be let loose to tempt people, and only those who stay faithful to the Lord will go on with Him to Paradise. You must read the Book of Revelations; it's all in there.'

'Well, that's interesting, Mum,' you say, 'but I must go: Jessie needs help with her homework.'

1984. Your mother watches televangelism, joins a charismatic church and becomes Born Again. On the walls and doors of her house she puts up little tracts decorated with pictures of cute kittens, or forest scenes. They look as if they might have come from America. When you visit her you walk from room to room, trying to read them all, surreptitiously memorising a few. 'Jesus - our help for today, our hope for tomorrow'; 'Lord grant me patience, but HURRY!'; 'Begin your day with nutrition: read the Bible'; 'Help me remember, Lord, that nothing's going to happen today that you and I can't handle'.

1982. In New York's Central Park, 800,000 people demonstrate against the nuclear arms race.

'It's two months since you came over,' says your mother on the phone. When you get there you notice her sad, red-rimmed eyes. 'Are you eating properly?' you ask, 'getting enough sleep?' 'I can't sleep,' she says, 'at least, not for more than a few hours. So I get up and watch television.'

1980. Fifty year-old Icelandic woman, Vigdis Finnbogadottir, is elected president of her country. Australian Evonne Goolagong Cawley wins the women's singles at Wimbledon. 'Look what women can do these days!' says your mother. When I was young we didn't have a fraction of the opportunities you girls get today.'

In Western countries more than 52% of women aged between 15 and 64 are in the workforce, up from 45% in 1969. These statistics don't help your mother who is 58, left school at 13, and has just been retrenched from her sales job.

In the U.S. an ex-Hollywood actor, Ronald Reagan is elected to the Presidency. You worry about him, sitting in the Oval Office, his hand on the trigger, imagining himself in some old western.

1977. Charlie Chaplin dies on Christmas day, aged 88.

As he does every Christmas day, and on many other days besides, your husband starts on the beer as soon as the turkey goes in the oven.

1975. In November the Governor General dismisses the elected Whitlam government, eighteen months before an election is due, because Malcolm Fraser's opposition has blocked supply in the Senate. Your husband wears a Shame Fraser Shame badge and walks around muttering and punching his right fist

into his open left hand.

In July you give birth to your first child, and call her Jessica. You don't know it yet, but she will be your only child. You are, after all, one of the baby-boomers, a group who will go down in history as failing to reproduce at a high enough level even to replace themselves.

A colleague visits you in hospital, bringing a copy of *The Female Eunuch*. To kill the long hours in bed, you read it. You think: she argues well but it's all a bit extreme. When you're happily married, you don't really need this stuff.

1974. One day before Christmas, and four days before your twenty-first birthday, Cyclone Tracey devastates the city of Darwin.

You awake one morning and, as you swing your legs to the floor, you feel the vomit rise into your throat, bitter and gagging. You try to remember when you last had a period.

1973. At Easter your father dies suddenly of a heart attack. You are numb for months, stumbling through your days, trying to support your mother.

Towards the end of the year, the man you have been going out with for eighteen months suggests you get married. You think, why not?

1972. It's your second year at university, and a girl in your group say to another, 'If I'm Not Married By The Time I'm Twenty-one, I'm Giving Up.'

Feeling self-consciously important, you and your best friend walk to the Town Hall to cast your First Ever Votes. Everyone has been saying Twenty Three Years Is Too Long For Any One Party To Be In Power; so you don't need to spend much time deliberating in the cardboard booth.

After 23 years of a Liberal-Country Party government, Australian voters elect the Labor Party, under Gough Whitlam.

1970. The Westgate Bridge collapses. Your French teacher, who has made an artform of humiliating you over your failure to grasp irregular verbs, is away from school for a fortnight. 'Her fiancé was killed - he was an engineer working on the bridge,' is what is whispered around.

Six American soldiers are charged with premeditated murder and rape of civilian women at My Lai.

Richard from Across the Road, who is three years older than you, asks you to go the pictures with him. You accept, and sit through three hours of Steve McQueen doing car chases. Three month later Richard is called up for National Service and leaves for Puckapunyal. You say you'll write, but you never do. Some time later you hear from his mother that he has gone to Vietnam.

*The Female Eunuch*, by Germaine Greer, is published. You don't buy it although it's in all the bookshops, newsagencies. What does it have to do with me? you think.

1967. In Cape Town, Dr Christian Barnard performs the first human heart transplant, but the patient



only survives for eighteen days.

Your father tells you that you will be a teacher or a nurse. Your mother says nothing. You dry retch at the sight of blood, so the choice is easy. Your brother will be an engineer or a doctor.

In Melbourne, a man named Ronald Ryan is hanged.

1964. The Beatles come to Melbourne, staying at the Southern Cross. Crowds of teenagers fill Exhibition Street, from Bourke to Collins Streets. On television, you see Paul and George waving from their balcony.

1963. President Kennedy is shot and killed in Dallas, Texas. You sit with your parents and watch endless re-runs of the killing on the TV news programs, the blood an improbable pale grey, not like the shiny black blood in the films you have seen.

1962. James Watson and Francis Crick, together with Maurice Wilkins, receive the Nobel Prize for their work on the molecular structure of nucleic acids, particularly DNA, using X-ray diffraction.

You hear your parents talking about the Cuban Missile Crisis. 'One False Step,' says your father, 'and there will be A Nuclear Holocaust And The End Of Human Civilisation. But if anyone can deal with it, Kennedy can.'

1959. Your parents buy a television. But they let you watch only the ABC. You quickly tire of the black and white men with strange vowels and boring suits. You return to your multicoloured books.

You ask your mother to teach you the song she's always singing: 'How much is that doggie in the window?'

1957. You receive your first book for Christmas. The next day you hold it on your lap and turn the pages carefully. In the book there are coloured pictures of a girl, a boy, a dog, a ball, a mother in an apron, and a father who comes home from work carrying a small case in one hand and a hat in the other. You cannot take your eyes from these pictures with the black squiggles underneath them. Your father points to the squiggles and says, 'Betty. This is Betty. John. This is John. Patch the dog.' He sits with you in the big velvet-covered armchair until tea time, pointing to each squiggle, and saying the words. Over and over. Then he points to a word and you see it's no longer a squiggle and you say, 'Betty.' He points to another: 'John and Betty'. Suddenly, smiling, he lifts you up, up, out of the chair, while you still clutch at the book, and he is calling out to your mother: 'She can read, Helen. I've taught her to read.'

The nuclear H-bomb is tested by the British on Christmas Island.

Your mother goes Next Door to watch Bing Crosby on television, and comes home singing 'White Christmas' to you, although neither of you has ever seen snow.

1955. The realisation hits you, like a bucket of freezing, that the pair of arms always around you, and the smiling face with its aura of black curls and the soft voice murmuring then singing, singing then murmuring, is not joined to you, at the hip, or wherever, but a separate being who walks away with the

man with the deep voice and the large ugly hat. You sit in your cot and scream and scream until you are sodden and hiccupping and exhausted; but she does not come back. Until morning.

In Tokyo the Fifth International Conference on Planned Parenthood is told how women who have taken newly-developed pills containing progesterone or norethynodrel do not ovulate. This medication, with a failure rate of only one pregnancy per thousand women per year, will become referred to as The Pill.

December 28 1953. Your mouth, your nose, every orifice and airway, feels full of some cloying alien substance that you cannot spit out no matter how hard you try. You are choking, but not quite. You are . . . not even *you* - no, not really *that*, not for some time yet (but there is no other pronoun available) - just an amorphous mass with no boundaries, no beginning and no end, but spreading spreading because you are being squeezed and pushed, by the walls of the too tight tunnel with the blinding light at the end, and now being pulled - cold claws and a crushing at your temples - the gasping the choking the screams the lights the gasping the gasping the cold so cold... You are born.

Early 1953. At King's College, London, a woman named Rosalind Franklin studies X-ray diffraction of DNA crystals. Photographs of her research are leaked and soon two men, James Watson and Francis Crick, announce their 'discovery' of the basic structure of a double helix showing how genetic chromosome material in animal and human cells can duplicate itself.

You are unaware of the ways of the world because at this time you are a bundle of cells, first two identical ones, then four cells, then eight, then sixteen, until you look like a blackberry made up of 64 cells. This cell division takes place during the three days that it takes you to move along one of your mother's Fallopian tubes into her womb. By the time you get there molecular biology has already decided what colour hair you will have (at least, until you start dyeing it, in your thirties), what shaped nose (a chromosome for each of the different bits), what colour eyes; and your intellectual and physical potential. Oh, and your sex. Ignorant of all this - at least for another ten days - a young woman named Helen listens to her wireless and sings along with Eartha Kitt ('C'est Si Bon') and Patti Page ('How Much is that Doggie in the Window?'), while on the other side of the world Bing Crosby stars in 'White Christmas'.

**Carolyn Lee**

## Tangled Realitions

Gillian Forwood, *Lina Bryans: Rare Modern 1909-2000*.  
Melbourne: The Miegunyah Press, 2003.

### Reviewed by Maryanne Dever

Reading through back issues of *All About Books* recently, I was struck by the photo of Jean Campbell adorning the cover of an April 1935 issue. Campbell is all hat, lipstick and insouciance, and while the photo is familiar, most readers today would probably struggle to say why it feels that way. One reason for the seeming familiarity is that the same pose features in perhaps the best known of Lina Bryans' portraits, *The Babe Is Wise (Portrait of Jean Campbell)*. That portrait, painted in 1940, takes its title from the novel Campbell published the year before, and the image has been reproduced on various book covers and postcards in recent years. I've chosen to begin with this connection between Bryans and Campbell for two reasons. First, both Bryans and Campbell remain vaguer figures in the Australian cultural landscape than they perhaps deserve to be, raising interesting questions about the tangled relations between gender, modernism and the writing of cultural history in this country. Bryans and Campbell each produced a substantial body of work across their careers, but neither has garnered the critical attention she arguably warrants. This is especially so in the case of Campbell who has barely benefited from the upsurge over the last three decades in scholarly interest in Australian women writers of the 1930s and 1940s. Second, Forwood's biography of Bryans gestures towards some of the unexplored links between women writers and women painters in mid-twentieth century Australia. Bryans became a key figure in Melbourne cultural life; as well as her close friendships with Campbell and with Nettie Palmer, and her associations with the *Meanjin* group, suggest there is room to consider connections across - rather than simply within - the literary and artistic communities of this period.

This study of Bryans is the first comprehensive account of a woman artist who, Forwood acknowledges, has been consistently overlooked in the major Australian art histories. This is despite the fact that her work hangs in every state gallery in the country and many regional ones. Bryans could not be said to be alone in her marginal critical status. Despite the rediscovery of Australian women artists of the modernist period and the 'postcard and tea towel' celebration of Thea Proctor, Margaret Preston, Grace Cossington-Smith, Joy Hester and, more recently, Stella Bowen, many - including Grace Crowley, Ethel Spowers, Eveline Syme and Dorrit Black - still await serious attention from contemporary biographers. Forwood asserts that the principle reason for the polite neglect of Bryans is her failure to sit comfortably within the established critical parameters for discussing the Melbourne modernist school. In Forwood's account, Bryans emerges as a strong-minded individualist who allied herself with neither the George Bell school nor with John and Sunday Reed's Heide 'family': the opposing factions that are generally taken to encompass the Melbourne art scene of the period. Histories of Australian modernism that have enshrined these two counterposed groupings have therefore failed to register Bryans' presence on the scene.



The notion of someone who does not fit neatly within established boundaries becomes a useful touchstone for Bryans' biographer. Forwood admits she was thrown when she first encountered the aging Bryans and was informed that 'she [Bryans] knew nothing about modernism'. 'It came as a shock',

Forwood recounts in her preface, 'until I realized that she did not think in terms of 'isms'. She theorized neither about art nor life; unconfined by conventional boundaries, she often overstepped them.' Bryans was born Lina Hallenstein in Hamburg in 1909 while her wealthy Australian parents were touring Europe. She grew up in Melbourne's fashionable inner-Eastern suburbs and throughout her adolescence accompanied her parents on further European tours, trips that enabled her to become familiar with the National Gallery in London and the Louvre. Her early marriage to Baynham Bryans was short-lived and she soon moved out to live independently with her young son. Increasingly drawn to Melbourne's artistic circles, Bryans turned away from her establishment background and the social restrictions it imposed, and embarked upon what can only be described as a bohemian existence. Forwood details Bryans' developing artistic vision, her influential relationships with fellow artists William Frater and Ian Fairweather and her purchase of Darebin Bridge House which became a significant gathering point for a circle of artists that included Frater, Ada May Plante and Adrian Lawlor. What emerges from Forwood's carefully researched account of Bryans' life is a clear sense that her talents extended beyond her own individual creative efforts: she also had a particular talent for fostering the work of others. And for a period of time in Darebin Bridge House, one of the few remaining colonial buildings in the Heidelberg area, she also provided the space for some of those talents to flourish.

Bryans is best known for her portrait painting and (as she rarely took commissions) her portraits provide an intimate glimpse into her immediate circle of friends and associates. The portraits of Jean Campbell are among her most recognizable, and they capture the spirit of uncompromising independence that the two women evidently shared. They also convey a strong sense of style and excitement in their new visions of modernity, fashion and the feminine subject. Her equally sensitive portraits of Rosa Ribush provide further clues to Bryans' close connections to the literary world of Melbourne in the 1930s and 1940s, and particularly her interest - one she shared with Campbell - in the experience of the European émigrés who had settled there. While in Darebin, Bryans also became friendly with Clem and Nina Christesen, close friends of Frater. In the postwar years she was increasingly drawn into the world of letters represented by the *Meanjin* group located on the fringes of the University of Melbourne. From this period come her portraits of both Nettie and Vance Palmer and several of Nina Christesen. While Bryans found herself at home in these circles she did not necessarily share the tidy habits of someone like Nettie Palmer, a prolific letter writer and assiduous diary keeper. Forwood notes (no doubt with regret) that Bryans neither wrote very many letters nor kept a diary. This means that Bryans' own voice is often absent from critical episodes, leaving the reader more than a little curious about the personal responses of this glamorous and dynamic figure.

One particular strength of Forwood's biography lies in its engagement with Bryans' landscape painting. The recent focus on her portrait work, combined with a longstanding tendency to classify Bryans' work – inaccurately - as simply 'decorative', has meant that critical recognition of her striking landscapes has been limited. Forwood offers a forthright critical assessment of Bryans' landscapes as paintings in which she explored form and colour in ways previously not attempted in the Australian setting. Bryans clearly ranks alongside contemporaries such as Clarice Beckett, Dorrit Black, Grace Crowley, Kathleen O'Connor and Margaret Preston in her capacity to convey a modernist aesthetic link between the Australian landscape, its cities and their people. Whether she is tackling urban landscapes (Russell Street or Fitzroy or Elizabeth Bay) or rural settings, her paintings are boldly painted with a strong, impressionistic use of colour. The near-abstractness of later landscape works dating from the 1960s and early 1970s comes as a particular revelation. In them Bryans' shows a marked capacity to bestow an almost spiritual dimension upon the Australian landscape.

In the making of her case for Bryans' talent and vision as a portrait and landscape painter, Forwood benefits from the generous production values associated with the Miegunyah Press. Unlike other contemporary art histories that are often cramped by their publisher's skimpy budgets for colour plates, Forwood's study contains a wealth of colour and black and white images. This means that a substantial number of the works discussed can be closely examined by readers. This is a well-researched and beautifully produced work that makes a substantial contribution to our understanding not only of Bryans' individual career, but of the history of modernism in Australia.

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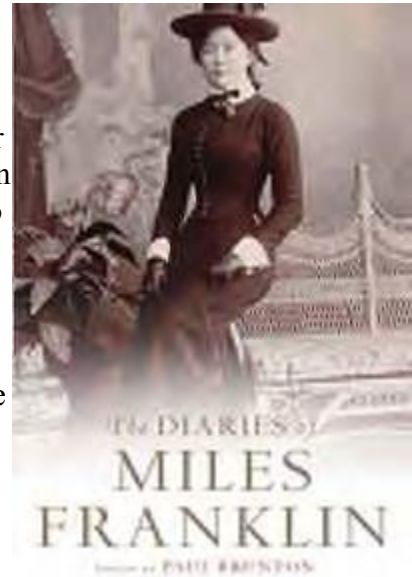
## A Dip Into a Rich Archive

Paul Brunton (ed), *The Diaries of Miles Franklin*. Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 2004.

Reviewed by Sylvia Martin

Many of us keep intermittent diaries, but Miles Franklin wrote every day for over 40 years. She started her diaries in 1909 when working for the National Women's Trade Union League in Chicago, eight years after the young writer had burst onto the literary scene with her rebellious novel, *My Brilliant Career*; and three years after leaving Australia for the United States. Her last diary entry was made in early 1954, the year of her death, when she was living alone in the family home in suburban Sydney.

The diaries are extraordinary in their scope and variety. They range from short entries of everyday doings in the pocket diaries ('Pottered', 'Worked in house and garden', 'Went to the Mitchell and read') to the extended book reviews in her literary notebooks. Here, we can read her opinions of the latest in Aust Lit; Eve Langley, Xavier Herbert, Norman Lindsay, Katharine Susannah Prichard - they're all there. There are also occasional pieces, often lively and irreverent descriptions of events such as the Women's Conference at the 'Sesqui beano' in 1938 where Dame Enid Lyons, wife of the prime minister and mother of twelve, 'talked and talked for an hour or more... and blew over it a vast wheeze from the bellows of motherhood'. Moving, reflective pieces occur more frequently as her remaining family members die and she becomes increasingly isolated.



A Franklin contemporary suggested the diaries might be her greatest contribution to Australian life and letters. Publication has been eagerly awaited, and on the fiftieth anniversary year of her death we have been given the first taste of what they contain. Restricted for years, not least because of libel laws, access to them has also been awaited with trepidation, as their author's caustic wit was used unsparingly on her colleagues. Now, we can read her scathing comments about Mary Gilmore, whose dame-ship rankled: 'egregious tout and self-booster'; that she finds Christina Stead's books 'repellent' and Eve Langley's 'phoney'. Eleanor Dark, however, is 'master of her creations'. Physical descriptions are also succinct: C. H. Grattan has 'legs rather bandy - biggish bottom', while editor, Beatrice Davis, is 'delightful, like a thoroughbred polo pony, small and slight'.

Edited by Paul Brunton, senior curator of manuscripts at the NSW State Library, this is only a selection of the entire diaries. Furthermore, he has selected only from the diaries covering the latter part of her life, after she had made her final return from the United States and London to Australia in 1932 at the age of 53. The period covered provides us with a rich social document of over twenty years of Sydney literary life, viewed through the eyes of a major player and acerbic commentator. While this in itself offers memorable reading, the editor gives no rationale for his choice to concentrate on the last part of her life at the expense of the important expatriate years which offer so many clues to her later contradictions and idiosyncrasies. His introduction fills in the missing years, giving a brief chronological account of her life up to the time the 1932 diary entries start. The question remains unanswered as to why we are not given edited extracts from her life in the US and London. Perhaps there is to be a prequel, but it seems a rather odd way to proceed.

Brunton is a well-known and highly entertaining performer of extracts from the diaries, his dry delivery keeping his audience enthralled and in gales of laughter at Miles Franklin's outrageous wit. Those who have heard him tell the tale of the 'Sesqui beano' or the fortieth anniversary of the enactment of woman suffrage in NSW with Mrs Quirk MLA as chief speaker will not soon forget it. Nor will they forget his reading of Franklin's account of the then State Librarian, John Metcalfe, delivering a lecture at a book festival in Newcastle:

He had a music rack on which to place his address, which was printed, & which he read steadily at a dead level for an hour, a steady droning hour without gesture, joke, zip, geniality, emphases or inflections, chiefly on Mexican bull-fighting.

Unstinting in her observations of the frailties of others, Miles Franklin herself was a bewildering mass of contradictions: 'gay, intrepid and unique', as Katharine Susannah Prichard described her, and yet obsessed with secrecy. Its strangest manifestation was her Brent of Bin Bin pseudonym, under which she wrote six epic novels, never revealing herself as the author while dropping hints everywhere. In the diaries she doesn't admit to being Brent either (you need to go to the letters to intimate friends like Mary Fullerton for that) but promotes him shamelessly in her literary notes - 'the only novelist of magnitude who is interpreting Australia from the inside'.

Beneath Franklin's gregarious exterior lurked a persistent depressive tendency that haunts the diaries. She described them as 'a bastard relief for a desire to write, frustrated by interruptions and disharmony'. Concerned with the difficulties of being female and a writer, she eschewed marriage as creating 'charwomen'. Yet, ironically, as the dutiful unmarried daughter, she spent her later years in Australia looking after her restless, senile mother and, after her mother's death, her widowed brother as well as a war-shattered nephew with alcohol problems (only briefly mentioned here, but discussed more fully in letters to Jean Devanny and others).

Torn between a commitment to family (which is tied in with her passionate nationalism) and her writing, she oscillates between resentment of her obligations and guilt. Some of the most poignant entries are written as letters to her deceased father (who died when she was in England in 1931), and to her mother after her death in 1938. In these moving pieces where diary develops into memoir, Franklin revisits her rural childhood home and landscape. Like so many daughters, she reveres her gentle father, while her brave and difficult mother still has the capacity to 'wound' her 'from beyond the grave': You too must have been desperately unhappy, confined in a hopeless net of circumstance where your immense capability was wasted. Now there is nothing but this deadly silence. Interestingly, Franklin wrote a novel during the Chicago years called *The Net of Circumstance* about the plight of a woman whose situation resembles her own at that time, which was published under one of her more amazing pseudonyms, Mr & Mrs Ogniblat L'Artsau (Austral Talbingo backwards).

The main problem with this edition of the diaries is that, although Brunton is so lovingly familiar with them and has done a thorough job of annotating the entries and providing some linkages where necessary, he lacks a feminist analysis of Franklin and her time. Apart from acknowledging and drawing on the work of historian Jill Roe, in particular her two volume selection of Franklin's correspondence, he does not even pay lip service to the more than two decades of feminist scholarship that exists, starting with Drusilla Modjeska's 1981 book, *Exiles at Home*, and continuing in the work of historians and literary scholars such as Carole Ferrier, Valerie Kent and Joy Hooton, to name just some. These scholars have analysed *My Brilliant Career* and the way critics assumed the novel was merely autobiographical when it was deliberately contesting the conventional romance plot for women. They

have explored the effects of its reception on her choice of an expatriate life and on her later extraordinary use of pseudonyms. They have examined the position of women writers and colonial writing in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; and they have analysed how her feminism and the masculinism of the Australian nationalism she was passionate about conflicted and contributed to the ambivalence and contradictions in both her writing and behaviour.

If Brunton were more aware of this body of writing, he would not have been able airily to say, without reference to anything, that '[t]he story has arisen' that Miles Franklin left Australia because of adverse family reaction to the depiction of what they saw as themselves in *My Brilliant Career*. (Modjeska, for instance, considers the complex problem of why she left Australia at some length.) Nor could he have glibly interpreted Franklin's statement that the story of Sybylla Melvyn 'illustrates the misery of being born out of one's sphere' as a self-diagnosis of psychosomatic ill-health. Nor reduce her Brent of Bin Bin persona to 'very much a publicity device'. A wider reading would have helped in some of the annotations too. It would have made it obvious that the letter of 7 August 1945 that is pasted into the diaries and begins 'Well, my dears' was not, as he states, probably to the London friendship network of Mary Fullerton, Mabel Singleton and Jean Hamilton, but much more likely to have been to Dymphna Cusack and Florence James who were at that time sharing a house in the Blue Mountains. (In 1945 Mary Fullerton was close to death in Sussex and Mabel Singleton and Jean Hamilton were completely estranged.)

*The Diaries of Miles Franklin* is a handsome production, copiously illustrated, and with useful thumbnail sketches of characters who appear in the diaries at the back of the book. A bibliography of further reading would have been a useful addition. It has been lovingly put together by an editor who is highly experienced at working with manuscripts. If I would have liked more, the riches of what *is* there make the publication one that should be on the shelves, alongside the letters in Roe's *My Congenials* and Ferrier's *As Good As a Yarn With You*, of anyone interested in the history of Australian literature and in one of its most fascinating and complex writers.

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## Joan's Story: Race, Delusions and Contested Memories

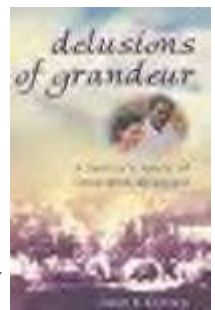
Joan E. Eatock, *Delusions of Grandeur. A Family's Story of Love and Struggle*.  
Jukurrpa books (an imprint of IAD Press), 2003.

Reviewed by Suzanne Dixon

Family history is a kind of archaeology. The midden of memory is dug up and odd fragments surface from the various layers. Views vary on how to piece them together, how to interpret them, how to reconstruct their context. Stories are told and memories cherished within families and each member's version is different. Publication, like a family death, often brings to the surface old resentments and rivalries. Is there ever a single, agreed truth?

This is one story of the Eatock family, as told by Joan, the second of six children born between 1933 and 1947 to Aboriginal Dick (Roderick) and Scot Elizabeth Eatock.

This family has plenty of stories. The inclusion of the Eatocks would have enlivened (and broadened) the disappointing ABC series on family dynasties. The main theme here is Dick and Elizabeth's turbulent marriage, but Joan Eatock raises big issues that left their mark on the family - notably, communism, the depression and race relations.



Forget Australian Dynasties, there is material here for a TV saga to rival *The Thorn Birds* or *Power Without Glory*: eviction riots in 1930s working class Sydney, a century of racial persecution, internal Communist Party brawls, imprisonment, family feuds, violence and madness. We even have that TV favourite, the matriarch, the redoubtable socialist battler, Lucy Eatock, who seems to have been viewed by the Balmain police as a political Kath Pettingill, producer of troublesome sons and inciter of sedition. Fighters all, Lucy's sons were very much her boys but, in the end, apparently fled Sydney to escape her. Yet, though she pervades the book as a kind of looming, sometimes unseen presence, it is not Lucy who is the lynch-pin of these fascinating family snippets and the source of pain and continuing conflict within surviving members, but a dark incident from January, 1956, when her son Dick, apprehended for threatening the life of his wife and younger children, was deemed a dangerous psychotic and confined for the next seventeen years. Joan's bitterness about his original admission and the role of other family members is apparent in her account, foreshadowed in the prologue and elaborated in the later chapters. At a time when these sisters, now formidable matriarchs themselves, are re-uniting to celebrate the big birthdays and their successful lives, the publication of the book predictably re-opens wounds and highlights conflicting memories in a family which has known more than its share of estrangements.

But first, the overview. The book is divided into three unequal, chronological sections: 1905-1936; 1937-1952 and 1952-1988. The first and by far the longest section (pp.7-144) begins with the backgrounds of the main characters and some of the key events in the lives of Lucy's children. It ends with Elizabeth and Roderick settling in Queensland and with the disappearance of Noel Eatock (b. 1912) from any connection with the Eatock family after his release from Bathurst gaol. The various characters of the spreading Eatock family are introduced and we see at first hand their living conditions in working class Sydney in the depression, the activities of the Unemployed Workers' Party (why don't we have such a party now?), the impact of Communist splits and upheavals on their lives, the antagonism they faced from police and courts. The Eatocks were labourers, boxers and factory workers.

Elizabeth's family, which emigrated from Scotland when she was a young woman, was a cut above them socially. The first chapter begins with Roderick's birth in a tent on a riverbank in far western NSW. Both mother Lucy (1874-1950) and father Bill (1869-1943) had Aboriginal ancestry and met in western Queensland. Eatock speculates (p.22) about the impact of traditional culture on their ideas and of early Labor action on the consciousness of the bookworm Lucy.

Fascinating stuff. Or it should be. But it is sanitised, leached of interest by *Women's Weekly* sentiments apparently intended to personalise the account ('She stood tall without any hint of the stoop that many girls of her stature developed,' pp. 110-1). I was frustrated by the superficial treatment of the political issues and the scarcity of dates. Sometimes I had to work hard (with lots of flipping backwards and forwards) to follow the sequence. Chapter 17, for example, provides full detail of Elizabeth's wedding costume and Roderick's (fictionalised) inner thoughts, but no date for the event.

The second section, pp. 147-190 covers the period 1937-1952, the family's time in Queensland, where Elizabeth's parents had settled. We read of Roderick's wartime service in the CMF and his work on the railways and the growing virulence of the arguments between husband and wife. The account of a fatal air crash near the girls' school in 1942 is one of the best and most natural sections of the book (pp. 158-160). Interestingly, we find hints here that Elizabeth and Roderick both had their own racial prejudices against the Japanese and African Americans, as well as the best discussion in the book of racial discrimination against Roderick and the resentment of white soldiers working under his orders.

In Queensland, away from his mother, Roderick withdrew from political activity, perhaps in reaction to his brothers' imprisonment and the family's scapegoating down south. In the CMF, Roderick qualified as a surveyor and gained promotion. He was clearly a clever man, but his erratic behaviour is also evident in his sudden departures awol, probably triggered by his sexual jealousy of Elizabeth (pp. 161 ff.). This section brings home to the reader what was obscured earlier - that we find we are now reading a devotional history of Roderick rather than of the family at large. Elizabeth is treated sympathetically, but almost relegated to the margins.

Section 3 (pp. 193-222) is obviously brief, but central. The broken narrative has been leading us up to these crucial chapters. We return in chapter 37 to the incident from January 1956, introduced in the prologue. After yet another night of strife, Roderick roused the family early and told them they were taking to the road with their swags.

Joan and older sister Jean had left home by this time, so knew of the incident and its leadup only at second-hand. Joan sets the scene with her own hindsight impressions of her father's state of mind, detailing but playing down the paranoia that led to his insistence, among other things, that the house was full of microphones. Her account of the trip to Nambour is told from a child's point of view and leans on the impressions of Pauline, who was fourteen at the time. In spite of the father's violent and erratic behaviour and his insistence on carrying a rifle and ammunition, Pauline and eight year old brother Roderick saw the strange and sudden expedition as 'a bit of an adventure' (p.203), but she concedes that her mother and older sister Ellen, who was sixteen, were frightened. In fact, we were told in the prologue that all four children were 'confused and a little frightened, for [they] had listened to the row that had raged through most of the night'(p.1). One imagines the rifle did not help.

Sisters Ellen and Pat tried to argue their father out of his plan. Pat, just eighteen, managed to stay behind and went to the police, who showed little interest in following up on her complaint that her

father was threatening her mother's life until her grandfather joined her at the station. Pat later testified at the proceedings of the Mental Health Board. The exclusion of the wife from the proceedings before the Board and the initial refusal to take the daughter's report seriously are reminders of the frankly patriarchal response of the police to such complaints before the 1970s. Joan embellishes her anguished quotes from the official proceedings with invented asides from her sister Pat's testimony.

Chapters 38 and 39 detail attempts by Roderick himself and his family, especially his sister Cath, to have him released and some details of his treatment, including electro-convulsive therapy, that 1960s atrocity which has now - incredibly - been revived. He was eventually released in the early 1980s (no specific date given) to the care of daughter Pauline. He died in 1987, surviving Elizabeth by nearly eight years. They did not get together again. She lived with her oldest daughter, Jean.

This book, then, is not a family chronicle but a public re-reading of a tempestuous marriage and an impassioned plea for understanding of a father cast out of society and branded dangerous. After all the coy and stilted elements, the final section, the heart of the narrative, is a shock. But it is too late to engage the reader. Rather, it is so much a personal attempt to come to terms with painful memories that the reader feels intrusive, voyeuristic. Its opening puts Joan at the centre, with her shocked reaction to her father's letter after that incident.

Eatock clearly struggles to look fair, trying as a mature woman to see in hindsight her mother's point of view but, again and again, she writes as Daddy's favourite, trying to redeem his reputation in spite of the facts she feels bound to admit. His extreme sexual jealousy and suspicion of his wife - which also clearly colours his possessive, controlling behaviour towards his daughters - is alluded to off and on but does not figure in the account of that final journey which resulted in his arrest. To be sure, some of Roderick's behaviour (even the instruction to his wife to shoot their daughters if the Japanese invaded ) was typical of his peers. Eatock's gripping child's eye view of the Battle of Brisbane highlights the sexual suspicion Australian servicemen entertained of the US troops (p.165).

Mixing genres is the current fashion and skilled writers can do something interesting with a book which keeps the reader guessing, but here the author's anguished ambivalence and the wavering focus and varying styles confuse the issue. I wondered why the author chose to embed her central emotional issue - her father's vindication - in a poorly told general story. She is clearly not comfortable with the family history format and could have benefited from some solid, professional advice and editing. A frank, personal tirade might have been more satisfying for author and reader. As it is, the book is neither therapeutic journal nor 'objective' history. Its unevenness confuses and distances the reader. I wasn't sure if this was because she hesitated for personal reasons to elaborate on certain things or simply did not realise, because she knew the stories herself, that she was not giving a clear account. At times, Eatock scatters hints like a mystery writer laying clues: allusive references in the prologue; Roderick's shock that his bride ('this pure damsel of his dreams') is not a virgin (p.110), his rage at finding her and his sister-in-law entertaining GIs (pp. 161-4) and his cover story to the police that his armed excursion in 1956 was a response to Elizabeth's intended elopement with a lover (the reason the wife's testimony was disregarded, according to daughter Pat) are ultimately played down in the overall narrative. Like Roderick's verbal and physical violence, they are mentioned but later discounted, in spite of her own comment about the aftermath of the GI incident: 'The row went on through most of the night and penetrated my mind, even though I did not understand much of what my father was accusing my mother of. As the years went by, this row was to be repeated over and over, and we came to live in dread of any spark that would set it off again'(p.164).

Eatock's own account makes it clear that Roderick was both violent and paranoid, but she is also right to point to the tendency of doctors to discount his well-founded fears along with his obvious delusions. His tales of family persecution were treated as fantasies although most of us would now agree that his brothers were railroaded for political reasons. Incidents in his childhood - and doubtless many in his working life - showed that looking Aboriginal was enough to deprive you at the least of accommodation and job opportunities, of the travel you had paid for and the respect your position normally commanded. In an age when people in need of care are virtually let loose on the streets with little support, it is sobering to be reminded that you could once be virtually incarcerated for years if you were deemed a danger to yourself and others.

I have my own ambivalence about amateur history, compounded in this case by an involvement with the Eatock family. Pat Eatock is a good friend of long standing. The author is not a trained historian and it shows, but she has conscientiously worked through a list of what a historian ought to do. J Eatock consulted original documents and conducted interviews - which she lists in an unhelpful, general way at the end of the narrative. Like many amateurs, she employs a stilted style, at times verging on Kath and Kimese:

That evening, Adam, Ethel, Noel, Betty and Lucy all contributed to an impromptu wedding breakfast, after which the couple retired and proceeded to write letters to Elizabeth's parents, Alex, Cath and Don, informing them of their nuptials.

The over-formal prose is tempered with personal detail, motives and conversation in the modern fashion. That frequently makes it worse - an editor should have intercepted some at least of the nights of 'tossing and turning'.

Joan Eatock does her best to provide some historical background and to treat the wider factors - particularly racism and ideological upheavals and the persecution faced by communists and indigenous people - which shaped the family history. But she doesn't do it well, in spite of her own considerable political credentials. Hall Greenland's account (in an appendix to 'Red Hot') of the Balmain riots and Noel Eatock's subsequent incarceration is much meatier and more informative than the one provided here. She gives us just enough hints to appreciate that the Eatock boys were hung out to dry by the Stalinist CPA (and, of course, local Labor activists) and suffered doubly from a racism that the establishment enforced and the internationalist socialists barely acknowledged. Two Eatock brothers were serving overlapping gaol terms while their families needed them. The emotional impact of the imprisonments on the men involved and the backwash on the women of the family are touched on, but never developed.

Lucy's personality and politics are key issues which are ineptly handled. Daughters-in-law clearly found Lucy just as much of a hard case as the police did. Perhaps her mythic role in the family still makes it difficult for a granddaughter to say so in so many words, but that is frustrating for the reader, who would like to know more about the tensions and huge falling-outs that are catalogued or referred to incidentally in Joan Eatock's account. In fact, the cosy style of the first section often reduces Communist battler Lucy to a stereotypic sweet old lady.

Overall, I found this a frustrating read, perhaps because I was so interested to begin with and my hopes were unrealistic. After all, the book is published professionally and that leads to certain expectations, even within the very diverse area of lifewriting and family history. My disappointment, and the knowledge that my friend Pat Eatock felt hard done by in Joan's account, might well have led me here to undue harshness. History, after all, means such different things: a recital of events, the restoration of

family honour, a tribute to a forgotten region, trade or way of life. Our own family and personal issues and experiences inevitably colour our responses to such accounts. Most family and institutional histories suffer from a certain aridity as well as lack of basic skill, but occasionally their personal, amateur character can produce refreshing, original slants, like the odd *Sydney Morning Herald* obituary which breaks the mould. Engagement, even partisanship, can bring the past to life.

In my judgement, this story leaned more towards the arid than the lively, but that may be a fair price to pay for opening up the notion of history. Any re-telling of the past can be contested, all history is manufactured, invested with myths, prejudices and wishful thinking. That applies to biographies of Cleopatra and accounts of centuries-old wars in foreign places as much as to an obviously personal tribute. Perhaps historians like myself should control our knee-jerk suspicion of works of piety or vengeance produced by insiders and devotees.

In the end, every family story, every personal story is worth telling.

**Suzanne Dixon is a well-known feminist historian of marriage and the family and has published several books and numerous articles and reviews. She is a former academic, who taught Classics and Women's Studies at the University of Queensland for many years. She is now a free-lance writer and researcher, currently working on a biography of a famous Roman mother (Cornelia) and a study of Australian inheritance disputes.**

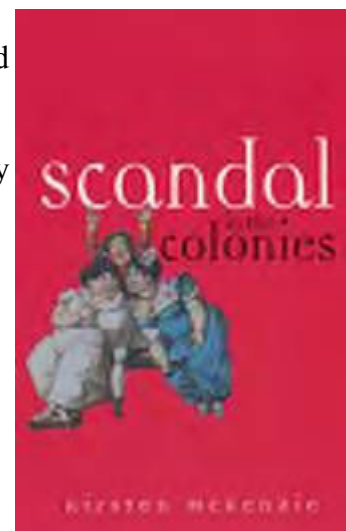
## Fear and Loathing in the Empire

Kirsten McKenzie, *Scandal and the Colonies: Sydney and Cape Town, 1820-1850*.  
Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2004.

### Reviewed by Marian Quartly

This important book should be read by every historian of nineteenth century imperial and colonial history. Within that category I include every historian of nineteenth century Australia, be they students of women's history, cultural history, political history, even military history. This is because *Scandal and the Colonies* returns us to the grand project of 'the new social history'. It sets out to demonstrate how society works, or more specifically, to show some of the workings between 1820 and 1850 of the societies of Cape Town and Sydney, and of the larger British Empire of which they were constituent parts. It tells us important things about the nature of shame and honour in the colonies, about hierarchy and status, about sex and marriage. Ultimately its theme is the emergence of the imperial bourgeoisie.

These may seem large claims for a book about scandal and gossip. But Kirsten McKenzie tells us that 'Scandal had the ability to draw domestic and imperial politics into a seamless whole'(92), and her tale is marvellously persuasive. She reads the flow of imperial gossip both for its content - what it tells of the social strategies of individuals and families - and for its agency as the context within which imperial policy was created. An ex-convict's libel case against a Sydney newspaper demonstrates the mechanisms of exclusion and inclusion that shaped society and politics in New South Wales. The tale of the allegedly incestuously pregnant daughter of a South African judge (and we never find out whether she was indeed pregnant, let alone the victim of incest) reveals how the judge successfully manipulated those same mechanisms in South Africa, bringing down a governor and shaping imperial opinion in the process.



The method is close to that employed by the ethnohistorical social historians of the nineteen eighties, but the analysis is more dynamic, directed towards social and political outcomes rather than mere description, however thick. Partly this is achieved by the constant comparisons drawn between Sydney and Cape Town; like practice turns out to be unlike, and dissimilar strategies produce similar outcomes - all with great significance for our understandings of how the two societies worked. And most crucially McKenzie follows historians of imperial culture like Catherine Hall and Anne Stoller in understanding gender, class and race as mutually constitutive ideas and practices, continually making and being remade by specific moments and sites in history.

Take for example just one strand of this rich argument - gender and its relationship to gossip. Historians have tended to accept the judgement of their male subjects/informants that gossip was generically women's business located in the private realm - a fit subject for women's history, perhaps, but hardly relevant to the politics of empire or nation. McKenzie's stories show that scandal was 'political discourse'(11) with the power to shape public events, and she reads its location in the private sphere as evidence of the power of women - to make or break reputations, to include or exclude by the rituals of every day life. These binaries - male/female, public/private - shaped personal experience at the most basic levels. Shame, for example, was a gendered concept; for a man it normally involved his commercial credit, for a woman her bodily integrity. The boundaries between the male and female

worlds were sacrosanct, and the most severe censure fell upon those who blurred them: the father who apparently involved himself in the termination of his daughter's pregnancy; the army surgeon and governor's confidant who was allegedly discovered after death to be a woman. But McKenzie also shows that these boundaries were not fixed, that in both colonies the period saw a historically contingent reshaping of the public political sphere which redefined the masculine citizen by excluding women and sexual activity.

At another level McKenzie's history is about performance - public performances and private ones made public by scandal. From the metropolitan view-point the colonies were deceitful places where 'people could be other than what they seemed'(1). Ex-convicts presented themselves as respectable patriarchs, Dutch housewives pretended to be English ladies, and only the power of gossip could challenge the veracity of their performance. The men and women whose stories fill McKenzie's pages are not so much the failed performers as the most ambitious - those whose claims to social status and respectability so far departed from reality that they became liable to the regulatory power of scandal. It is remarkable how well many of them managed to ride out the storm.

The scope of McKenzie's argument is impressive. She moves easily from the detail of individual performance to the broad sweep of imperial policy. Her introduction establishes the liminal role of the port cities of Sydney and Cape Town within the empire, places where fortunes were made and reputations invented. The first section, 'Patrolling the Boundaries', describes the usefulness of gossip and scandal to attempts to contain this social fluidity by strengthening the separation between masculine public life and the feminine world, and by managing the conspicuous markers of status and class - clothes, houses, manners, and ultimately reputations. The second section, 'In the Courts', draws on a series of legal cases, mainly of defamation (by business men anxious to preserve their commercial credit) and breach of promise or seduction (by women desperate to defend their virtue and their marriageability). In both of these, the comparisons drawn between Sydney and the Cape find more similarities than differences; the action of class and gender tends towards the same bourgeois, respectable outcome in both cities.

The third section, 'Transforming the Colonies', turns on another similarity - the requirement imposed by the metropolitan conscience on both colonies that they should rid themselves of their dependence upon unfree labour. And despite the significant difference in the ideological marking of that unfree labour - convicts being marked by criminality and slaves by colour - McKenzie argues both were equally scandalous in metropolitan eyes. And both were represented by abolitionists as corrupting the colonial family. McKenzie writes in a characteristically lively phrase that the domestic lives of both groups of colonists 'became the subject of a metropolitan gaze that was half scandalised horror, half fascinated titillation'(124). She shows how metropolitan criticism painted each system with the imagined sins of the other: convicts were represented as cringing slaves, slaves as morally corrupt and criminal. Women slaves and women convicts were especially depraved and liable to deprave colonial children. This was almost entirely a metropolitan discourse; colonials of all political persuasions were as one in rejecting the characterisation of their colony as a place of unnatural corruption. But McKenzie also shows how in the next decade the colonists of Sydney and Cape Town drew on the same stereotypes of moral abnormality to reject British attempts to renew colonial transportation. The imperial bourgeoisie in the colonies had learnt its lesson well.

The book is beautifully written, with an easy command of complexity and an ear for the telling metaphor: 'Colonies remained the dirty and disorderly children of an imperial mother if they failed to maintain the proper boundaries between classes, races and genders in the hierarchy of society'(152). The production is handsome, apart from the idiosyncratic snatches of prose randomly extracted and boxed into the text, in the style of a magazine supplement; Melbourne University Press should know better.

**Marian Quartly**



## Still Manufacturing Consent

*Critical Readings: Media and Gender*

Cynthia Carter and Linda Steiner (eds.) Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2004.

Reviewed by JaneMaree Maher

This book's Foreword says that it 'succeeds in highlighting important interventions while, at the same time, providing a sounds basis for future enquiries' (ix), in the field of feminist media studies. This contention is borne out in the contents of the volume, which are thoughtfully chosen, systematically arranged and clearly introduced. While most of the concepts contained in *Critical Readings: Media and Gender* will be familiar to scholars in the area, Carter and Steiner have organized and presented key articles in a structure and format that will render this an extremely useful volume for those who teach in the field as well as those seeking an introduction to the breadth and concerns of feminist media scholarship.

Carter and Steiner argue that the media are important because of their 'long-acknowledged power to represent "socially acceptable" ways of being or relating to others, as well as to allocate, or more usually withhold, public recognition, honour and status to groups of people' (1). Their introductory essay insists on the important political stakes in media representations and access, and they cite the suffragists' calls for their own periodicals to support their campaigns as clear and early evidence of this. As they note, 'the media are crucial in the processes of gaining public consent' (2), and their volume addresses the ways in which the media manufactures such consent as well as the opportunities for contestation. They note that feminist interventions in the media have not only been in the sphere of critical commentary, but that media institutions and representations themselves have been changed by feminist advocacy. The distinctions that feminists theorized between 'sex' and 'gender', Carter and Steiner argue, were a necessary tool to enable these interventions. Despite recognizing the on-going sexism in most forms of media and in the upper echelons of media institutions, Carter and Steiner insist that the media 'are also capable of playing a significant role in bringing to world-wide attention the material harms that women may suffer' as a result of the perpetuation of sexist norms (5-6).



Having established the political agenda and context for the book, Carter and Steiner then explain the three-part division of the volume: Part 1 deals with the narrowness of representations of femininity, Part 2 examines the difficulties women face in entering and succeeding in the media institutions that control those representations, and Part 3 deals with the ways in which audiences are able to engage with, and use or subvert representations and structures. These three parts represent, they explain in the Introduction, the key strands of feminist critical thought and activity in this field of scholarship, although they acknowledge that all these forms of critical activity are ineluctably intermingled.

The essays chosen for each Part represent some of the central critical breakthroughs in the field of feminist media studies and offer an interesting mix of pieces from well-established scholars and new voices. Part 1, 'Texts in Context', contains Myra McDonald's examination of how advertising insists on normative heterosexuality, and Sherrie Inness' work on modes of femininity in women's magazines as well as investigations of how representations of potentially challenging identities are recuperated and contained when they appear in mainstream media forms. Patricia Holland explores the on-going

sexualization of women's bodies, while Marguerite Moritz does a close analysis of television shows that feature lesbian characters. Moritz concludes by suggesting that 'these scripts employ a certain amount of ambiguity in that lesbian characters are permitted some degree of victory in their own personal battles. But, in almost every instance, that victory is balanced by other messages, both in the text and in the visual content of the show, that suggest that these characters have a long way to go before they achieve equal status with their heterosexual counterparts' (121). Saraswati Sunindyo offers an exploration of representations of women and violence in the Indonesian media in a series of high-profile murder cases in the early 1990s.

This essay forms one of a strand throughout the volume, a dealing with media representations in contexts other than United States or the United Kingdom, and addressing cultural diversity as a critical question in the politics of media. Part 2, for example, contains an essay by Carmen Ruiz on a communications programme in Bolivia that sought to gather and foreground women's voices in public debate. Part 3 contains Elizabeth Hedley Freyberg's critical investigation of the limited and stereotypical representations of Latina and African American women in mainstream Hollywood cinema. In 'Sapphires, Spitfires, Sluts and Superbitches', Freyberg describes how female actors of colour have been constrained by these stereotypes, both in the roles they have been offered and their careers more generally. She finishes by asserting that although 'the diverse stories of African American and Latin women have not been told ... their stories will survive just as their cultures have survived in spite of the multifarious means employed by Anglos to nullify them' (282). But Freyberg's critique also inspires the reader of this volume to consider the Anglo-centric nature of much of the criticism represented here, and its predominance in the field of feminist media criticism. Freyberg's comments have wider applicability than in the mainstream Hollywood film setting in which she locates her argument.

Part 2, '(Re)producing Gender', focuses on the critical structures that underpin 'contemporary media research' (143) and how attention can be directed to questions of ' "race", ethnicity, sexuality, class, and nationality' (143) as they impact on media workers and media product in turn. Margaret Gallagher reports on the Global Media Monitoring Program and argues that more sustained attention must be given to evaluating the impact that the policies been developed under the auspices of this monitoring tool and others like it ( 153). But she does consider that 'at the very least, the process of media monitoring has an impact on the way people "see" or understand the media' ( 155), as well as helping people identify the gap between what's there and what's not. This section of *Critical Readings: Media and Gender* also includes John Beynon's systematic account of how various forms of masculinity have been popularised, and why, in 'The Commercialization of Masculinities'. He focuses on the increasing diversity of 'new man-ism' in the media and the uses of this diversity to other commercial enterprises. There is attention to various forms of media and how they participate in the reproduction of gender, including the internet in the essay by Anne Scott, Lesley Semmens and Lynette Willoughby, and rock music in Helen Davies' critical account of the ways in which the music press reinforces sexist stereotypes in its approaches to female artists.

Part 3, 'Audiences and Texts', brings the question of the audience and its participation in the making of media meaning to the fore. Mary-Ellen Brown's work on soap opera is represented here, as are accounts of the dynamics of daytime television and pornographic representations. This section concludes with Heather Gilmour's examination of gendered behaviors in computer use and some concrete suggestions on how computer software, specifically here for young children, can be used to move users beyond 'conventional notions of the feminine as a monolithic category' (343). Gilmour's essay is entitled 'What Girls Want', and she cites Donna Haraway's utopian vision of the cyborg world

as one where 'science and technology can provide fresh sources of power as old dichotomies are called into question' (343). She concludes by suggesting that producing software for girls could be viewed as a pleasure rather than a problem and this cautiously hopeful note sounds at the end of *Critical Readings: Media and Gender*.

The last pages of the volume contain a good glossary of critical terms, which perhaps epitomizes the central value of this volume. *Critical Readings: Media and Gender* offers an extremely useful toolkit for students of critical media scholarship and those who educate in this field. It presents the contemporary landscape, both of the media and of critical media scholarship. It offers a thoughtful evaluation of the changes produced by activism and scholarship on the basis of gender, and identifies the crucial challenges still faced by those interested in media truly open to diversity and difference. It insists on distinguishing various forms of critical engagement, and various forms of media, thus opening out possibilities for critical reflection and scholarship. In *Critical Readings: Media and Gender*, Carter and Steiner achieve their goal of offering readers 'a critical resource that is broadly indicative of the current state of critical, gender-sensitive research' (6), and reveals the discourses of power that enable and delimit the power of the media.

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## Unexplored Territories

Susan Hawthorne, *The Falling Woman*. Spinifex, Melbourne, 2003.

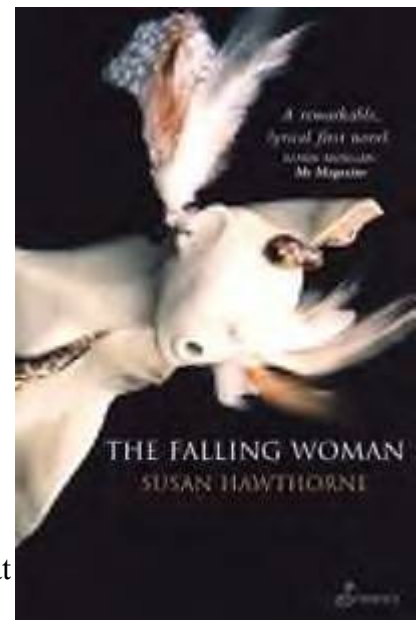
Reviewed by Jasna Novakovic

This book commands endless reflection, since it opens up the ontological question of being. Hawthorne's book haunts me, it won't let go. On the one hand, it journeys through an unexplored territory of mind that few apart from Dostoevski dared look into, but his *Idiot* was an insight into stigmatization. We have moved on, we are more accepting today, yet we are still struggling to understand; those who suffer from brain disorders more than anybody else. Only that is obvious from *The Falling Woman*. Everything else is inference, symbol, a code. The crucial passages of Hawthorne's novel, those which are italicized and constitute one of the three narrative lines, remain the most elusive throughout.

Let me first say that this is a perfectly structured piece of writing. Its form should help unravel the threads of signification, but we are not dealing here with the explicit, let alone the assertive, or blatant. The only certainty Hawthorne has is that nature is her cradle. Descriptions of the Australian landscape hold the same prominence in the narrative as actions and dialogue, they inform each other. Or rather, birds and creeping creatures, the plants, the forms and images found in the vast expanses of desert land, the beauty of sand dunes and rocks, inform the thought.

Although the list of Contents names just four sections, *The Falling Woman* also has a fifth: a Prologue, untitled, half a page long. In it the moment of seizure and the third person narrative merge, to describe what epilepsy looks like from the inside and from the outside. A glimpse into a woman's mind that spans light and darkness is, metaphorically, likened to the sun that has a blinding power and sinks at the end of the day into the void. And, by extension, to the light of consciousness and beyond where the sun and flower are one, and seizure is the corollary of an electrical explosion. This is an attempt to understand the complexity of the natural universe that human beings are part of. An individual, a woman, sees herself as a synecdochical representation of that universe. And with this the whole process of the construction of the 'I', of one's sense of the Self gradually takes shape.

This is by no means a uniform process and the three narrative lines of the novel deal with various levels of human perception of the world, interaction with the world and emotional response to the world. One is a personal history, another a 'real-time' journey, and the third the protagonist's spiritual link with the past. Thematic shifts largely evolve as a consequence of growing up and are found in the account of Stella's upbringing from the day she was born. Those memories are triggered by iconic signs that crop up in the course of the narrative concerned with the present or, more precisely, with the vicissitudes of the journey to the Australian outback and a mature woman's relationship with another human being who also happens to be a woman. Stella appears here, by implication, as Estella. She is clearly a 'different' woman. The same associative method is used to set off the third narrative line that alternates between the first person singular, direct address and the mythical mode. It is italicized and remains an



allusive reminiscence, or rather a set of allegories. Entwined, they all pass through three sections of the novel that tackle the composite problem of time (titled 'Vision'), of sexual awakening and the issue of gender (titled 'Vibrations'), and of a mature woman's subjectivity as she becomes aware of the philosophical dimension of her existence (titled 'Voice'). Only in two instances does the name of Estelle appear in the novel: at the moment of childbirth, of coming out into the world, and towards the end, when acquiring wisdom possessed by Cassandra.

Of course, the three variations (Estelle/Stella/Estella) derive from the Latin word for 'star'. Its symbolic meaning works as a constant reminder of the elusive quality of human existence, of dreams as driving forces and their archetypal quality. Even when coming closest to naturalism, Hawthorne's poetic language connotes the unknowable. It provides ongoing figurative reference to phenomena that puzzle our limited cognitive capacity. For instance, this is how she introduces Stella to the reader: 'On the day Stella was born a star fell from the sky. No one saw it... It left no mark.' Stella will traverse her life path like a star that leaves no trace when it burns out. She is an ordinary person, a synecdoche for all living matter, not just humanity. What is more, this book manages to conjure up states of being that are generally deemed inexpressible, because they are not associated with the word. The fetus's awareness of her environment is one such instance, an infant's sense of harmony with the world another. Her consciousness is captured by word rhythm, an approximation to the music that language makes to her ears, and by the presence of a single concept: mother. The baby's fascination with constellations undiminished by her smallness against the infinite space of the sky is the source of an adult sense of harmony and belonging.

Hawthorne's ontological knowledge builds during her quest for a more inclusive vision, where closeness to death seems more enlightening than ordinary experience. That initial feeling seems confirmed by the novel's closure. In the beginning, a scene of Stella almost drowning is juxtaposed with an italicized passage, perhaps an expression of her pre-conscious that is latently present, as if the white girl's mind were a repository of collective memory that has appropriated Aboriginal women's experience of sand dunes and 'the starlight on the water'. These italicized reminiscences, it will soon become clear, follow no linear time-line, they jump freely all over Hawthorne's ontological circle inside which the logic of reason moves. But evocations of Aboriginal dreamtime crop up more frequently in this section of the novel than in 'Vibration'; they reemerge in 'Voice' and develop into the frame of mind in 'The Fall'. Inbuilt is iconography of white women's classical heritage, current scientific knowledge, the philosophical implications of linguistics. Estella's memory of her mother's friends in a 'ritual showing of the latest flower, shrub or tree that survived the drought' hinges onto italicized image of woman cultivating the earth; the common notion of epilepsy as 'the sacred disease, the divine disease' now called 'the falling disease', is superseded by the description of the epileptic state itself; the process of language appropriation through learning how to spell reveals how the Self imposes itself on the exterior world, how it overshadows reality and creates the illusion that one 'commands' it. What is more, the linguistics informs the process of Self-identification with the loved one who is seen as a complementary being, the source of pleasure encoded from the moment of conception by biological symbols for two chromosomes, in this case identical ones: XX. They are to give birth, poetically speaking, to S(tella) and O(lga), the two protagonists of the novel. One passage in the book, though, encapsulates best the host of images on which *The Falling Woman* bases its epistemology.

I stand in front of the mirror. I spin. I try to see myself spinning in the mirror. I see passing shadows. My arms fly out to the side like wings. I spin. I see alternating light and dark.  
It is like passing my hands back and forth quickly before my eyes. It is like the fast running shadows of a line of trees as I fly overhead. There is a flickering, a flailing, a flying. The mirror captures me flailing, falling. The mirror entraps me, hold me entranced.

My arms fly outspread like galactic arms. I spin in space. I am a spiral in time.

The mirror-reflection of the 'I' is an indication of the origin of Estella's fascination with the birds, with snakes, with spiral forms in nature, science and philosophy. The rejection of the premise of the linear in favor of a spiral-like flow of time is the pervasive idea that underpins the entire novel, both its content and its structure. It allows Hawthorne to acknowledge the presence of historical dynamism without strictly adhering to the concept of dialectics. And it allows her to incorporate ritualistic chant that 'becomes a mantra' in order to conflate Aboriginal and Greek legends, to tell the story of emus that became stars, of seven maidens who metamorphosed into seven Pleiades celebrated by Psappa's poem.

Estelle/Stella/Estella is 'a moment in time'. 'I fall', she keeps saying, as her three narratives, merging again into a single spiraling line, are about to fold. The death, birth and existence that separate them appear as one. That is perhaps why the 'I' of the italicized passages so often struck me as someone's dreamtime. But I was unable to tell whose dreamtime exactly. It could have been anyone's, taking place in a landscape which was Australian, an experience that surpassed the particular in the author's attempt to give an infinitesimal small human being the importance she attributes to herself.

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## Rousing Waves

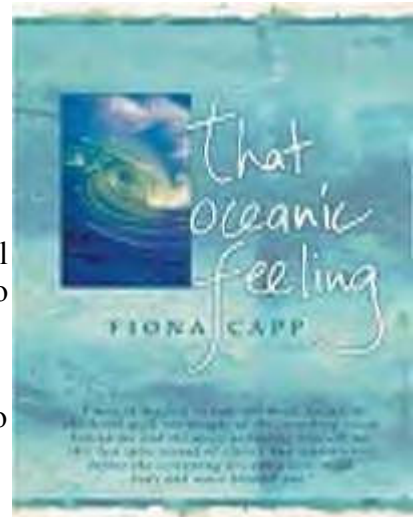
Fiona Capp, *That Oceanic Feeling*. By Sydney: Allen & Unwin, October 2003.

Reviewed by Dominique Hecq

*That Oceanic Feeling* is the narrative equivalent of a body poised on the edge of a wave, deciding on its letting go with the surf. Letting go. The opportunity to enter and master the wave is one that Fiona Capp faces again and again throughout the book. And she lures the reader into her element. It is a romantic gesture.

As the author recounts the story of her return to the water, her personal journey becomes a literary one. More than this: the book spills out into an exploration of surfing as cultural phenomenon and a revision of what it might mean to be an Australian in the twenty-first century.

In purely aesthetic terms, the writing is superb. It draws the reader into what I would call a participial narrative, one that enacts language, pushing the confines of the essay as a genre into the surf it should enter. The prose is full of energy - sensual and sensuous, sharp, smack cool and luxuriant all at once. Seductive.



Capp has moved on since *Night Surfing*, more versatile, more adventurous: risk-taking yet confident. This is no doubt related to working in a different genre: 'The beauty of writing fiction is that you have the upper hand over events you invent... But with non-fiction of the kind I was writing, I was beholden to fickle circumstance - and nothing was as fickle and changeable as the weather in this part of the world.'

If turning to non-fiction has entailed a rethinking of the relationship between living and writing, it has also entailed a rethinking of writing itself. At issue, though, is less a use of language beyond convention than a loosening of the sentence. And there are intimations of Virginia Woolf here, whose work Capp has indeed been re-reading. Yet it is not *The Waves*, nor *A Room of One's Own* that comes to mind, but texts concerned with a writer's sex and her writing, such as 'Professions for Women' and 'Women and Fiction'. In the latter in particular, Woolf argues for a different kind of sentence that 'has to be found to carry the reader on easily and naturally from one end of the book to the other.' What 'easily' and 'naturally' mean, you will figure out for yourself, dear reader, but at one point Woolf adds something that might resonate with you as you cruise through *That Oceanic Feeling*: 'this a woman must make for herself, altering and adapting the current sentence until she writes one that takes the natural shape of her thought without crushing or distorting it.'

*That Oceanic Feeling*, that 'ever-swelling story - like a wave which gathers energy as it travels across the ocean', acquiring 'insight and inspiration' from the stories of people encountered along the way, will take you, just as it took its narrator, on a journey from the waters of Victoria to Byron Bay, Hawaii, Cornwall, and France. Don't look back.

The journey begins with a sense of frustration. The writer is stuck with her third novel. The woman is stuck with the contingencies of her sex, a mother pulled between duty and desire. During the summer holidays, as she swims in the shore break at Sorrento back beach or plays with her young son in the rock pools, she finds herself casting furtive glances towards the surfers out beyond the break, 'like Prufrock watching the mermaids riding seaward on the waves and wondering, "Do I dare?"' She does.

Returning to the water is a momentous event, and the stakes are high. For the mother, this means confronting the rebellious child in herself. For the woman, moving from memory and recognition to liberation in a rearrangement of identity. For the writer, surfing the wave of language.

The stakes mark out a dream, where the surfer learns the language of the sea, and emerges believing she can conquer it. At first, there is a sense that this dream of omnipotence might come true. As the surfer returns to the coast of her heart, she seeks to find within the romantic landscape around her the soul of poetry, becoming herself part of that landscape, part of that ocean. This resonates throughout the narrative, most clearly, perhaps, in the sentence reproduced on the beautifully laid-out dust jacket of the book: 'I rose to my feet to take the drop, poised on the brink with the weight of the intruding ocean behind me and the wave unfurling beneath me: this last split second of clarity and separateness before the screaming descent where mind, body and wave became one.' But the woman is no ocean, and no landscape. Like surfing Corsair, her dream is one of attempting the impossible: the dream of the surfer as seer, perhaps, which would presume a degree of negative capability amounting to sheer surrender to the ocean - a deadly identification. For at the heart of this dream is Romain Rolland's metaphor of the oceanic feeling, a metaphor that conjures up the earliest phase of psychic life when the child and the world are one: 'Few images better capture this primal "at oneness" than that of the surfer crouched inside the crystal, womb-like tube of a breaking wave; an image made all the more exquisite by our knowledge of the wave's imminent destruction.' It is, of course, a matter of life and death that the surfer be 'expelled into the harsh light of the world', for 'that oceanic feeling' is an ambivalent metaphor. Capp does not really touch upon this ambivalence, although she did explore the death drive in *Last of the Sane Days*.

The nexus of the lives waiting for their moments in the waves is in their awe of the sea as well as the 'other'. To ignore or relinquish this awe, this love overlapping with respect, is to give up on language, life, and history.

The aborted 'story about refugees in flimsy boats risking everything on a voyage across an unknown ocean' sits uncomfortably in the text - it might have been on the author's mind, but it remains peripheral. Perhaps it may resurface as a story in its own right after some required period of gestation.

*That Oceanic Feeling* is about the uneasy alliance of the sea and the wind, the heart and the intellect, the subliminal and the mercurial. The book engages one of Australia's archetypal images of the sublime, suggesting its unexplored possibilities as much as its destructive or deathly counterpart. As one who knows the perfection of the surfer's moment, Capp does justice to the language and story lore of the coast of her heart.

**Dominique Hecq has published as a poet, novelist and translator.**



## ***To the Lighthouse Again***

**Jeanette Winterson, *Lighthousekeeping*. London: HarperCollins, 2004.**

**Reviewed by Evelyn Hartogh**

Twenty years after the publication of her critically acclaimed first novel *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*, Jeanette Winterson still manages to produce a fresh and highly original work further exploring issues of difference and separation.

*Lighthousekeeping* concerns the maturation of the orphaned Silver; who is entrusted to blind Pew the lighthouse keeper. Pew educates Silver in the ways of the world by unravelling stories within stories of the ancestors of the local inhabitants. He mixes local myths with mysteries, and scandals with acts of honour. The stories are related in layers to Silver, a framework of outsider's gossip is first outlined and slowly Pew draws closer to the main character's angle on their own lives. What Winterson achieves is a very effective explanation of why one should never judge a book by its cover.

Silver's name, the lighthouse setting and the loaded location names ('to protect the Turning Point, a light needed to be built at Cape Wrath'), bring up questions of a search for a positive identity in a dangerous world. Adding to Silver's mirroring, 'it reflects 95% of its own light', is Pew's blindness, and his stories about the Dark family, suggesting a theme of light and dark, truth and concealment, introspection and reflection; 'our business was light, but we lived in darkness'. Western cultural meanings of light and dark, embodied in metaphors of 'being kept in the dark' or 'casting light on' are brought into play.

The gender of Silver's lover is also shadowy, and the narrative interweaves pillow talk of Silver relating her childhood with all of its stories within stories in a Scheherazade fashion to her companion. However, unlike the romanticised *Tales of the Arabian Nights*, *Lighthousekeeping* reveals sombre realities beneath dazzling surfaces.

Once in the 'world' Silver tries to join a library but having no fixed address (or more accurately, being unable to produce a letter showing her name and address) she spends her free time reading books off the shelf and rushing back to finish them, hoping no-one has borrowed them. She becomes obsessed with *Death in Venice*; when the librarian herself takes it out, then takes a sickie, Silver stalks her and comes to the attention of the authorities. Silver's unusual way of looking at the world leads the police to pass her on to a psychiatrist, whom she confounds by explaining she is not a danger to herself or others, and is perfectly capable of getting jobs and supporting herself.

Silver highlights the assumptions made by social workers and the like, in their desire to categorise people as 'mad' or 'criminal' if they lack family support. While much of the novel is taken up by stories within stories, it is primarily the story of Silver and continues to follow her life when she grows up and decides to leave the lighthouse. While Silver's lack of family ties may make her seem a pitiable character, this is not an angle she has ever taken with herself; she has never compared herself to people with families or closely interacted with them, apart from hearing about them in stories.



Silver's lack of roots makes her free to move about in the world unfettered, but her attachment to Pew leads her back to the lighthouse although it no longer needs to be tended and has become a tourist attraction. The movement from need to novelty mirrors Silver's own journey to adulthood as her independence makes intimacy a luxury rather than a necessity. Silver is a person who defies assumptions and despite an assumed 'lack' finds fulfilment and joy in the world that surrounds her.

*Lighthousekeeping*, like many of Winterson's works, is a book about books and a story about storytelling. However, it manages this postmodern feat without alienating readers unfamiliar with some works to which it refers. Instead it creates a hunger for and interest in literature, in the multiple interweaving of tales of which this novel is made.

**Evelyn Hartogh has a Master of Arts in Creative Writing (University of Queensland 2002) and a Master of Arts in Women's Studies (Griffith University 1997). She writes freelance journalism including 'Pop Tarts', a humorous look at the cultural history of fictional women, for the Sydney glossy *Lesbians on the Loose*.**

## Lost, Searchin', for Years

Coral Hull, *Gangsters and The City Of Detroit Is Inside Me: Two Novellas*. Jacobyte Books, South Australia, 2001.

### Reviewed by Liz Hall-Downs

In these two interrelated novellas, Darwin-based writer Coral Hull once again tackles head-on the tough subjects of psychological abuse, domestic violence, victimhood, escape and redemption. Her first-person protagonist, Crystal, is a young woman in her mid-20s involved with Frazer, the 'gangster' of the title. Crystal is a survivor of abuse in childhood, and now finds herself again caught up in a cycle of abuse, unable to escape. 'In this fearful shaky world, children are not so much receivers of adult knowledge and love, but childhood survivors pursued by the great dark towers of adulthood' (13). We share in Crystal's struggle to find self-respect and safety, first in Sydney, and then in her later travels in America (which Hull refers to as 'The United States of the Apocalypse'). Within her destructive relationship with Frazer in Sydney, Crystal seems unable to do anything but be abused and temporarily run away, or stay and self-mutilate. Occasionally she fights back (for instance, when she throws a brick through Frazer's window), but at considerable risk to her own personal safety. The text details Crystal's growing understanding of the psychology underlying domestic violence, and her realisation that the world does not necessarily share in her notions of ethical behaviour and idealistic support for the underdog. Eventually Crystal finds the strength to reclaim herself and rebuild her life.

Crystal symbolically steals a diamond ring from the gangster's friends to gift herself with as a reward for escaping her situation. She wears it around her neck on her travels to America, which we enter into in the second novella. Crystal's perceptions of the massive urbanity of the cities of Chicago, Detroit and New York are contrasted with the wide open spaces to which she is accustomed. Hull memorably evokes the sights and sounds of these cities, in particular, the Statue of Liberty seen lit up from behind. In a surreal section, she meets and forms a friendship with a 'spirit boy' ('boy on the wire', 79), who accompanies her on her wanderings and shows her the city's underbelly.



She then falls in with an animal rescue group and, overwhelmed with the relentless suffering she witnesses, considers suicide: 'For I know that as I died the vision of vivisection would die with me, and then there would be nothing': she decides, however, 'to turn my life around, and to dedicate my brief existence fully and consciously to saving the animals in the city of Detroit' (83). Conditions in Detroit are compared with Canada, described as a little sister being led astray. Crystal meditates on life and death, signified by the seemingly futile rescue of unwanted puppies and kittens, dying pigeons, and abandoned, maggot-ridden sheep, and by thoughts of her own death: 'I will work my body to its savage limits, for animals and the earth, until it is struck down' (100). The presence of 'Gabby', a black labrador who comes in ghostly form to take the spirits of the dead puppies she lays in the snow, gives her sustenance and hope.

Hull also communicates the ironies of environmental degradation and species extinction. 'In the Toronto Tower souvenir shop they are selling a plastic snowstorm with the Canada goose inside it. The tower and buildings are painted on in the background. We always want the Canada goose in the foreground of our new possessions, when in reality it isn't there at all' (101). More sharply: 'The city is a machine, a tool, a cutlery utensil, which we use to feed ourselves the earth and turn earth to human shit' (75). The plight of poor urban children (92-4) is particularly foregrounded: 'for the children of

detroit' offers statistics, and a description of abused children being sent back to their probable deaths, while 'the Christmas tree' has a picture of a 'giving tree' on Christmas Eve, with no gifts under it, just the names of needy children who will remain needy.

In the end, Crystal leaves the fear, violence and decay of Detroit, and crosses the bridge into Canada, into the wilderness, with the 'spirit boy' as her companion, evoking a world in which the beauty of nature overrides the ugliness of humanity and its creations. 'We won't stop until we get to where the polar bears are sleeping in the arctic sun, tiny flurries of snow falling past their eyes and melting on their noses' (110).

From a technical point of view, lack of paragraphing makes these novellas read as convoluted, stream-of-consciousness narratives. As with a lot of post-modern writing (and some popular fiction), point of view or delineation of inner monologues are not sustained; the whole monologue is in the voice of a protagonist who is also at times an omniscient narrator, able to see into the hearts and minds of the other characters. This is not necessarily a flaw, but combined with the lack of paragraphing, it makes for a more difficult read. At times, the events described do not occur consecutively; this detracts somewhat from the author's message. However, this is still a strong and realistic picture of domestic violence and its aftermaths from both victim's and perpetrator's perspectives, and is well worth persevering with as it details the psychological states and constraints that contribute to and escalate such violence.

Overall, this is a picture of a young woman escaping the fallout from early experiences of abuse within both family of origin and in later sexual relationships, by attempting to transform herself and create meaning through giving love and comfort to sick, dying, and abandoned creatures. *Gangsters* and *The City Of Detroit Is Inside Me* are powerful and poignant works that reaffirm the value of both human and animal life, and celebrate resilience against often overpowering hardships.

**Liz Hall-Downs is currently completing an MA in Creative Writing from the University of Queensland and is working on a realist novel, *The Death of Jimi Hendrix*.**

## Stunt Flying

Amanda Lohrey, *The Philosopher's Doll*. Viking 2004

Reviewed by Rachel Slater

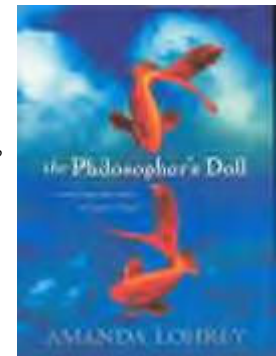
Lohrey's latest novel poses some big questions. How much free choice do we really have? What does it mean to be human? What do we know about consciousness? These philosophical stalwarts are unravelled alongside the lives of two suburban professionals grappling with their own big questions - questions of potential parenthood, infidelity and desire.

The age-old idea of heart versus head runs through the novel with the two main protagonists appearing to fall into their traditional gender roles. Lindsay is an academic, a philosopher; rational and logical, he values reason above all else. By his own admission he is 'obsessively punctual' with a 'love of order' (21). Kirsten, his wife, is elemental. She 'has a robust animality... a vital coarseness' (4) and is in turn a 'fiery creature' who lives off 'the very air' (5), 'earthy' (22) and watery - dreaming she has 'given birth to a tiny seahorse' (53). Whilst he is removed from life, ensconced in his ivory tower at the university and preoccupied with the idea of man as a machine that bleeds, she is very much engaged with it, working as a social worker for wayward boys and getting involved with their lives on an emotional level. Their opposing approaches to life collide when the issue of children arises. Kirsten's desire to have a baby is fierce while Lindsay advocates postponement until their inner-suburb Melbourne mortgage is under control. In terms of gender dynamics, Lohrey's portrayal of Lindsay and Kirsten comes close to essentialism. His calm, intellectual, rational and logical persona is juxtaposed by her emotional, hormone-driven hysteria.

Their relationship becomes increasingly antagonistic until fate intervenes. Kirsten, unable to make a decision that generations of women have fought so hard to own, subconsciously puts herself in fate's direct path and 'accidentally' becomes pregnant. Meanwhile, Lindsay, unaware of this life-changing development and hoping to press the snooze button on his wife's biological clock, decides to buy a dog.

In the background looms the potentially destructive figure of Sonia Bichel, Lindsay's PhD student and sender of pink, longing-filled love letters. Having assembled herself as an 'erotic terrorist' (236), she wants both to lose and to find herself in another and has selected Lindsay as the man for the job. Initially repelled by her meekness and passive devotion, it becomes obvious that Lindsay, feeling rejected by his wife and paralysed by the choices of a modern professional life, will submit himself to Sonia's fantasies. Desire is a strong current in the novel, as Lindsay's desire to be loved and admired, Kirsten's desire for a child, their mutual desire to control their world is examined in depth. Yet the reader is constantly reminded that no matter how predictable we believe our lives to be, or how much we want something - control over our own lives may be as limited as the beautiful, perfectly formed pedigree dog that Lindsay so admires. Fate is a capricious force and the heart cannot be subverted in favour of the head.

The structure of the novel supports the disruption of the character's lives. Having travelled two thirds of the way into the story entirely wrapped up in the dilemmas of Lindsay and Kirsten, in the contortions of their marriage and the complexities of their inner thoughts, the reader is brought to an abrupt halt. Narration shifts into the first person perceptions of Sonia, bringing distance and perspective to all the lives on display. Some readers may dislike this incursion into the story unfolding before them, but it



works to drag us out of the personal and back into wider issues underlying the novel.

Sonia's intervention in the texts, as in the lives of Kirsten and Lindsay, works to show us that we do not know these people at all. Lindsay is a Gulliver character, so smitten by reason and the notion of man as machine that he cannot fully engage with life. Early on in the novel he confides that he fears a child will ruin the spontaneity in his marriage, yet the relationship runs like clockwork - sex on Saturday afternoons, dinner out on Thursdays and a season ticket to the cinema. It is change that he fears most; having constructed his reality around right and wrong, black and white, he cannot deal with the grey areas. He is imprisoned by the vast choices Western society has to offer and, armed only with rationality, cannot escape them. While he is removed from life, Kristen is very much in it. She is both sensual and sensible and, having despatched rationality in favour of the unknown machinations of kismet, she is also complete.

Sonia's story also allows the reader to see into the future, to tie up the loose ends in a way that life never does. In what is essentially a postscript, we meet David Goodman, a cardiologist and participant in 'precision flying' and as such he seems to represent the idea that the heart and head work together. Yet in surgery he relies upon machines to support the heart, to take over from it for a limited period and in flying he needs precise mathematics without intuition or emotion. I found that the precision flying discussion failed to hold my interest and having been successfully drawn in by the rest of the story, this came as a disappointment. The reason for his inclusion in the story is not made overtly clear; perhaps he is there to underline the argument that in matters of heart versus head, there is no right answer.

Indeed, the reader is not offered definitive answers to any of the questions raised in the novel, but in addressing the argument - so prevalent in Western culture - that choice equals freedom and therefore happiness, Lohrey provides more than a little food for thought.

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## Discordant Tones

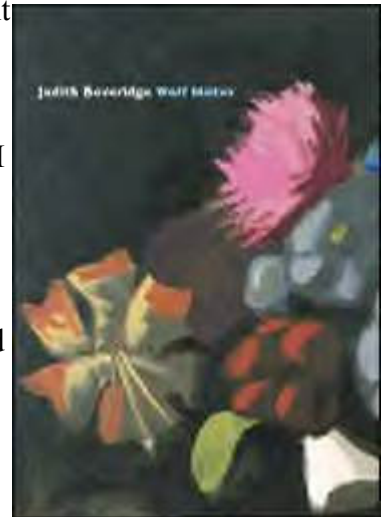
Judith Beveridge, *Wolf Notes, Walking the Fence Line*  
Newcastle: Giramondo, 2003.

Reviewed by Ann Vickery

*Wolf Notes* is Judith Beveridge's third collection after *The Domesticity of Giraffes* (1987) and *Accidental Grace* (1996). Matching Beveridge's own mature craftsmanship, Giramondo has brought a high quality of production to this publication. There is a generous formatting of the poems, plush paper, and a wonderful cover painting by Tony Clark, *Floral Design with Tiger Lily*, which gives an immediate impression of the rich sensuous journeys to be found within.

A wolf note, is described at the beginning of the collection as 'a discordant or false vibration in a string due to a defect in structure or adjustment of the instrument.' The poet's instrument is the voice but also language and Beveridge seems to invoke the latter in her title poem, 'Wolf Notes.' She declares 'So many dogmas/doggeries and the vulpine crimes/ of the past. I longed for elephants/ tigers, for a leopard's or a viper's/ stealth.'

Imagination's exotic jungle is contrasted with the domesticated, the language from 'foxglove, hound's tongue, and from/a field of sweet, dog-eared trees'(42). Beveridge presents here the archetypal Romantic paradigm, the yearning for wildness and sublimation ('the place... beyond knowing' 40) against the chain of genealogy that continues to yoke the poet. 'Wolf Notes' itself dramatises the modern poet's condition - lacing the sense of repetition, exhaustion, and defeat with genial puns ('Even the sun was terrierised'41) and flashes of humour ('I was doggerelled, kennelled-out, over-whelped' 42). In alluding to the colonial mistreatment



of Australia's dingoes, Beveridge seems to suggest that the Australian poet needs a language that can move beyond the simplistic primitivist dialectic of dark continent and British field - that in many ways, the Australian poet must walk the 'fence/ line' between collusion and freedom (40). Yet in much of Beveridge's work, the Romantic urge toward transcendence overwhelms any anxiety of 'falseness' or contamination. Unproblematically coherent and unified, the poetic voice tends towards the prophetic (with all the supplemental resonances of bardic truth, inspiration, even mystic insight). And the poetry itself is so aesthetically polished and clean in lines that it too, seems hardly defected. The self-consciousness of 'Wolf Notes,' then, is revealed to be more a temporary aberration, a discordant note in itself, than the setting or tenor of the volume.

'Wolf Notes' is divided into three sections and 'Wolf Notes' appears towards the end of the first and most impressive section, 'Peregrine.' At first glance, 'Peregrine' has the feel of a Lonely Planet supplement, describing the sort of exotic figures one might come across as a tourist in India: the young man flying a kite after work, the saffron picker, the dice-player, the pedlar, and the bone artisan. All those described are presented merely as types rather than having any individual features - the poet adopts the Romantic method of subjectively and intuitively imagining the lives of these Third World people without engaging with the implications of power that gives a First World writer the authority that might be required to undertake such a project.



This said, Beveridge does foreground the oppressive parameters of their lives. In 'Bahadour,' the young man whose life 'must drop like a token/into its appropriate slot,' finds freedom in flying a kite; for that moment he is equivalent 'only to himself/ a last spoke in the denominations of light' (15-16). The saffron picker collects crocuses in order to feed her children. Against the amazing statistic that it requires 150,000 crocuses to produce one kilogram of saffron is 'The competing zeroes of children's/mouths' (17). The standard weight is translated by the saffron picker as the weight of one full apron. While Beveridge reminds us of 'the indivisible hunger that never has the levity of flowers,' I found it offset by the aesthetics of the poem itself - so carefully, elegantly minimalist that in many ways it reproduced the symbolic beauty and grace of the flower. Beveridge's poems present almost essentialist portraits - while she speaks of the 'purple fields of unfair equivalence' in 'The Saffron Picker,' we never get a sense of how this unfairness actually bears out in the psychological and physical everyday of the woman's life (18). Perhaps significantly, Beveridge adopts the third person narrative voice in both 'Bahadour' and 'The Saffron Picker' as opposed to the first-person voice of 'The Dice-Player' or 'The Pedlar.' We do get more insight into the Pedlar's condition with his weariness of the gloss, the 'mock brilliance,' he must give to his wares in order to sell them (21). Yet, while we get more insight into the pedlar's attitudes, there is no sense of self-referentiality of Beveridge's own selling of wares. This is left to 'The Bone Artisan' which remarks humorously, 'a simple patella makes a dish (oh, yes say it) - for paella' and 'knick-knacks/ I nick every day from the knackery' (23).

Beveridge comes into her own with poems that return to the local for their detail. 'Woman and Child' seems specifically Australian with its mention of myna birds, magpies, and cockatoos. Here, Beveridge presents us with a woman whose depression is at odds with the otherwise idyllic scene of domesticity that includes her child happily playing and the antics of wrens. The woman's depression is likened to that of the writer who can never finish a text, 'Today,/ who can explain the heaviness in her head, as if/ all her worries were tomes toward a larger work/ one she knows she will never finish, but to which/ she must keep adding'(31-32). As with 'The Fisherman's Son,' 'Crew' is intensely lyrical with its sprung rhythm and alliteration, 'The sea is whitecaps,/ wind, the air the sound of frigate hawks/ sending out acoustic flares'(36). While this is a poem with many stunning and innovative metaphors, there is the occasional tired one, such as the 'fog thick as suet.' 'The Lake' also has some brilliant descriptions, the tannin from the melaleucas being described as 'a burgundy stain slow as her days spent amongst tiles and formica' (25). The casuarina are 'a troupe of orang-utans/ with all that loping, russet hair; and when/ the wind gets into them, there's a sound as if// seeds were being sorted, or feet shuffled amongst/ the quiet gusts of maracas' (25-26). Nature, particularly the birdlife at the lake, is constantly feminised, with mention of 'silk' and 'chiffon' and the egrets' necks 'curved like fingernails held out for manicure.' 'The Lake' recalls the self-consciousness of 'Wolf Notes.' Its artifice is gently hinted at, with intertextual connections drawn with Keats and Charles Wright. Against the rich offering of these poems, I mark a small editor's gripe. It seemed unfortunate that 'The Lake' immediately follows Beveridge's Indian portraits, for a contrast is set up between the poverty of the Third World and metaphors of manicure and luxurious cloths in the First World. The speaker's depression from 'Woman and Child' seemed insignificant, even indulgent, next to the plight of 'The Saffron Picker.' I doubt the effect of the juxtaposition was intended; these Australian-specific poems would have been better placed in a separate section.

Beside these two groups of poems are two oddly-placed prose poems, 'Exsanguination' and 'Whisky grass.' Perhaps because of the former's Louisiana setting, these poems have the feel of being directed to an American audience and may have appeared in an American journal in a former published life. Despite being out-of-place here, they are powerfully vivid works and would be wonderful starters to a



sequence in themselves. Besides the title poem, the first section ends with 'Dog Divinations.' While I read this poem as a lighthearted tease against the portentous, the note to the poem points out that it has been adapted from the *Sarngadhara Paddhati*, a medieval anthology compiled by Brahmin priests that recorded the 'science of omens.'

It therefore leads neatly into the second section, 'Between the Palace and the Bodhi Tree,' an imaginative reconstruction of Siddhattha Gotama's wandering through India before becoming Buddha. This section is the fulfilment of the longing for tigers and vipers outlined in 'Wolf Notes'; both animals have poems dedicated to them. There are further resonances with the first section, such as echoes of the egrets from 'The Lake' and the kite-flying of 'Badahour.' Although poems from this sequence were awarded the 2003 Josephine Ulrick Poetry Prize and, no doubt, reveal a number of Buddhist insights, their Romantic presumptuousness left me rather cold.

The final section, 'Signatures,' offers one last series of portraits. Beveridge once more projects herself into the position of various types: the apprentice, the artist, the sailor, the courtesan. While she may be suggesting a concept of 'false' signature to hark back to the title poem, these poems seem more accurately to reflect upon the relationship between the speaker and the subject, particularly the capacity of the subject to authorise him or herself. As narrative poems, they recall the work of William Stafford. As with Stafford's work and Beveridge's second section, they present an anecdotal form of storytelling rather than song. As with Stafford's work and poems from Beveridge's first and second sections, they often rely on a rustic or isolated setting. The figures and settings are romanticised. Two poems which are of interest in potentially touching upon women's experience are 'An Artist Speaks to his Model' and 'The Courtesan.' The former follows the traditional love lyric in presenting the female muse as unable to speak back. She remains fetishised, diminished in the speaker's quest to represent her and to speak his passion. The speaker declares with frustration that it is 'Impossible to get your/ lips to resemble fate'(108). While the speaker knows 'nothing can capture you,' he waits 'for your voice to short out/ my heart along the quickly burning/ length of St Christopher's spire'(108, 109). Besides his muse, other women are conventionally rendered as 'dark, serene' background figures who tend the flowers (109).

The longer poem on 'The Courtesan' seems immediately more promising in being spoken from a female perspective. She whets her clients' appetites by filling their bowls with water rather than food so that they may see her face reflected. Perhaps significantly, a poet who teaches her parrots songs and palindromes disrupts her emotionless life. Beveridge draws a conventional analogy between female containment and the aviary, except that it is more self-conscious here. The courtesan is 'outclassed by the guinea hens' (116). Reduced to pure aesthetic object ('All he wanted/ of me was to recline each evening on a bed/ of owl and linnet feathers' (115-116), she resumes agency by dismissing him. Almost magically, poetry comes to her. Yet her voice, a 'wind-crafted charm,' is unable to be controlled (116). She can only come up with the names of winds and her words evaporate 'into pale skies'(117). Beveridge finishes the poem with the courtesan awaiting the 'monsoon-predictor' as a storm brews within her.

The final poem of the collection, 'At Dusk,' seems a portrait of the poetic condition. The sounds of human song, Janis Joplin 'haemorrhaging through a hi fi' and the speaker humming along are overwhelmed by the surrounding sounds of nature itself (121). Indeed, perhaps the 'wolf notes' are those that are human-made - the final riff is left to the beasts.

**Anne Vickery**

