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Australian literary expatriatism is a cultural phenomenon that is widely accepted and often alluded to. The idea that Australian writers have laboured with or against a common desire to travel back to the site of British Australia’s cultural beginnings resonates with many, especially those who are able to bring to mind their own overseas pilgrimages. The more negative aspect of this is the idea that the Australian literary scene and infrastructure were too poorly developed to foster literary imaginations and thus practitioners were forced to leave in search of sustenance in the cultural metropolises of the old world (such as London and Paris). This feature of expatriatism is often bemoaned but seldom questioned, at least in reference to the first 160 years of European settlement. Indeed, a significant number of literary people did make the journey to try their luck at the centre of the publishing world, and thus there are plenty of subjects for Bruce Bennett and Anne Pender’s study: *From a Distant Shore, Australian Writers in Britain, 1820-2012*.

Interrogating the phenomenon of literary expatriatism is difficult because of the uneven and at times contradictory nature of the content already available. There is a lack of consensus in the field about the peak timing of the exodus. The result is inconsistent coverage of the alleged trend throughout Australia’s European history. Steven Alomes’ *When London Calls* focuses on the decades following the Second World War in response to what he sees as a ‘rising wave of postwar movement to Britain’.¹ For Peter Morton, author of *Lusting for London: Australian Expatriate Writers at the Hub of Empire, 1870-1950* the ‘haemorrhage of [Australia’s] literary brainpower’ took place in the 1890s and the early decades of the twentieth century.² Others have located the trend in the years following the Great War, or even have it persisting until the twenty-first century. Bennett and Pender’s depiction decidedly avoids this issue with sheer breadth of coverage: nearly two hundred years from 1820 to 2012. Beginning with the earliest literary expatriate on record (W. C. Wentworth who made the trip to England in 1817), the study includes writers overseas up until the present day.

The next stumbling-block for the aspiring chronicler of Australian literary expatriatism is the problem of inclusion. Who qualifies as Australian? What is an expatriate? Which kinds of writers should be included? For Bennett and Pender an Australian expatriate is ‘someone who was born in Australia and who spent substantial or formative periods of their writing careers in Britain’ (8). They extend this formula so it includes three writers who were brought to Australia as small children: Martin Boyd, Patrick White and M. J. Hyland. Of the qualifying people who also had a piece of creative writing published in the appropriate time period, Bennett and Pender narrow the field to include those ‘for whom the expatriate years made a difference, and in some way inspired or enabled their literary careers’ (8). There is no clear attempt to define what is meant by ‘creative’ writing.

It is necessary to fix upon some kind of parameter for inclusion, and Bennett and Pender’s criterion of Australian birth is certainly a firm one. Their professed aim to deal with

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individualistic and eclectic stories seems at odds with their decision, however, as individual stories soon reveal that national allegiance is more complicated than mere birth. Are we to accept that a person not born in Australia is not Australian? Besides the potential issues of discrimination this standpoint raises more generally, it is possible to have lived in an adopted country long enough to tip one’s internal culture balance in the favour of the new country. A second issue raised by Bennett and Pender’s parameters is one of unconscious selection. When answering questions about the significance of expatriatism to writing, only including writers for whom expatriatism had an effect presupposes the answer. Life experiences in general can be said to have an effect on writers, and without a study of all ‘expatriates’ one can never truly quantify the significance of the phenomenon.

Studies like this go a long way to rescue literary histories from the constraints of nationalism. Orthodox Australian literary history has, in the past, offered only two options for Australian writers. There was a choice to be made between nationalism (meaning remaining in Australia and contributing to the national canon while dealing with poor resources and resulting low levels of recognition) and internationalism (meaning either actually leaving and thus revoking one’s ‘Australianess’, or at the very least writing for a global (or British) market that would mean the removal of any local references). The consensus is that one could not be an ‘Australian’ writer and not be in Australia. Expatriatism of writers is generally seen as a loss to the Australian literary canon. This has had the effect of obscuring much of the work of Australian writers merely because they were overseas at the time of writing.

Bennett and Pender do good work to counter this damage that is still far from being undone. There is a focus on writers whose work has been largely ignored in Australia, such as the women romance writers abroad in the early twentieth century (Rosa Praed, Louise Mack, etc). Aside from being unknown, another fate that befell Australian expatriate writers was harsh treatment at the hands of their compatriots. Germaine Greer and Barry Humphries were well acquainted with the ‘venom’ directed at expatriate writers by fellow Australians because they were seen as guilty of some kind of betrayal. Humphries illustrated this by ‘defining the word “expatriate” as “traitor” in his glossary of Australian words’ (108). Christina Stead was another who ‘suffered’ for the crime of leaving, especially because her books were set in many different places (122), and reportedly was bitterly disappointed to miss out on the Brittanica Australia Award for Literature in 1967 because she was not seen as contributing to Australian literature (132). It would require more systematic study to determine whether the authors’ perceptions of Australian reactions are the result of a certain defensiveness leading to oversensitivity in this area, or if in fact expatriate writers were the recipients of an above average amount of vitriol.

Further assumptions about expatriates are examined by Bennett and Pender with interesting results. There are contrasting themes of escaping from a provincial, anti-artistic society only to find oneself trapped in another equally unfriendly one. Many came to the realisation that the ‘old world’ was not necessarily an improvement. The sheer weight of tradition and centuries of cultural accumulation in Europe could be oppressive, and the irreverent attitude of the clichéd Australian newcomer was not necessarily enough to counter this.

As a resource of information about writers who spent considerable portions of their life overseas, this is excellent. Like most of the other attempts to tackle literary expatriatism it has its methodological limitations, but has gone further than previous ones to remedy the issues surrounding this subject. The authors’ professed desire to explore individual stories

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without being tied to an oppressive theme or ‘generalising fantas[y]’ (2) allows for much that is interesting to be included, as well as nuanced discussion of the subjects’ literary works. It also allows for the much more sensible conclusion that the forces acting on writers who became expatriates were many and varied, rather than the inevitable result of the struggle to be a writer in Australia’s unpromising environment.

Helen Bones
In 1503, the Frenchman Binot Paulmier de Gonneville set sail in search of a route to the East Indies. Lost in a great storm off Cape Verde, he reached an unknown land which he called Indies Meridionale. After a six-month stay in this idyllic tropical paradise, Gonneville returned to France together with the chief’s son Essomericq who married Gonneville’s daughter Suzanne. Many years later, in 1663, their great-grandson published his ancestor’s memoirs. Subsequent research has suggested that Gonneville’s mysterious destination was in the region of Ilha de Sao Francisco on the coast of Brazil. But it was not for this discovery, documented in the first volume of Raymond Howgego’s *Encyclopedia of Exploration*, that Gonneville’s voyage became famous, rather it was for the place he imagined he had discovered.

At the time, Gonneville located his destination some six hundred miles to the east, rather than the west of the Cape of Good Hope, and part of the legendary southern continent, Terra Australis. When the influential Charles de Brosses compiled his own history of exploration in 1756, he included Gonneville’s voyage as the first for the Pacific region, preempting Magellan by 15 years. De Brosses’ compendium of voyages inspired generations of French navigators and their patrons. Kerguelen, Bougainville and Surville all drew impetus for their own voyages from the illusory, rather than real, destination of Gonneville’s voyage. So too did generations of English explorers, such as James Cook, who relied heavily on the translated version of the de Brosses text.

Howgego’s fifth volume in the *Encyclopedia of Exploration* acknowledges the role such imagined voyages and destinations play in exploration history. By dedicating an entire volume to *Invented and Apocryphal Narratives of Travel*, Howgego recognises the ways in which imagination and exploration inspire and fuel each other. Imaginary voyages are not just flights of fancy, or self-serving delusions, they inspire exploration of the unknown, fill the gaps in our knowledge and tell stories we’d like to be true even though they aren’t.

Another of Howgego’s genuine voyages also illustrates the intertwined relationship between the illusory and the authentic. Inspired by the legend of Gonneville, Yves-Joseph de Kerguelen de Trémarec, set off in search of Terra Australis in 1771. On discovering some tiny windswept islands in the Southern Ocean (now known as Kerguelen Islands), Kerguelen promptly sailed back to France, abandoning his consort ship, and reporting his discovery as a new southern France with an ideal climate for grain, crops and timber. The second ship, under the command of Saint Allouran continued the mission, sailing to the east until striking Shark Bay in Western Australia and claiming the region for France. Meanwhile in France, Kerguelen’s claims were greeted with a mix of enthusiasm and scepticism. Kerguelen was ordered back to the Southern Ocean to confirm his alleged discovery, and to find his missing ship, a voyage which ended with his officers’ disputing the idyllic descriptions of this ‘Southern France’ and Kerguelen being court martialed and imprisoned. Such close interconnections between fantasy and reality must have made Howgego’s task of compiling the first four volumes in this series difficult indeed, and no doubt prompted the creation of this fifth volume devoted to those voyages and accounts which could not be accommodated within the commodious pages of the earlier volumes.
Howgego’s fifth volume includes ‘invented, imaginary, apocryphal and plagiarized’ narratives through history, but the line between the real and the entirely fictitious is thin indeed. The real life inspirations for the novels of Daniel Defoe, Jules Verne and Jonathan Swift are well known, although Howgego, interestingly, often focuses on the less well-known fictional voyages of these authors. From Jules Vernes’ library, for example, Howgego draws only Journey to the Centre of the Earth, Journey to the Moon and The Sphinx of the Ice for closer scrutiny, but rather surprisingly not the better known Around the World in 80 days, or 20,000 Leagues under the Sea. Including even a subset of Verne’s expansive Voyages Extraordinaire series is a work in and of itself and illustrates the difficulty Howgego must have faced in narrowing the scope of this vast undertaking without compromising breadth. The resulting combination of the obvious and the obscure, the famed and the forgotten, is one of the great delights of Howgego’s book. Everywhere we read new fascinating details, even for people and voyages whom we might think were all too well-known. I knew, for example, that Laperouse, whose expedition famously vanished after visiting the nascent British colony at Botany Bay, sparked not only a plethora of real voyages and explorations in search of his fate, but also a fictional accounts about his unknown fate. Until reading Howgego’s account, however, I did not realise just how many of these fictional stories were written. Nor did I realise that one of them appears to have been written by Watkin Tench, better known for his actual accounts of Sydney’s early settlement than his fictional work. Similarly, the influence of Bougainville’s voyage to Tahiti on imaginative renditions of the noble savage and idyllic nature of primitive life is a well-studied in the scholarly literature, but Howgego’s text provides in fascinating detail the precise journey Bougainville’s narrative has taken through various fictional, satirical and sometimes apparently factual accounts, such as Diderot’s Supplement au voyage de Bougainville.

Navigating the journeys of these narrative influences within an alphabetical structure remains, perhaps, the only downside of this impressive body of work. Despite extensive cross-referencing, indices of books, imaginary places and names (in addition to the primary organising principle by ‘explorer’/author), uncovering the various threads remains a somewhat fortuitous and serendipitous process. The starting point is not always easy to find. The only solution to this problem is, of course, to dive in at an arbitrary point and see where the journey takes you, an activity which I have no doubt many of the readers of this book will greatly enjoy.

Danielle Clode

This volume contains 14 essays discussing different aspects of *A House for Mr Biswas*. Each essay in the collection examines the novel comprehensively, and each presents a distinct perspective. As mentioned by the editor, ‘more than half of them have been specifically written for this volume’ (4). The essays seem well connected and are arranged in such a fashion that they inform each other. It is further mentioned in the ‘Introduction’ that ‘even the others are very recent articles and all have been revisited by the authors to fit in with the purpose of the book to give new insights into the novel’ (4). It has been a long time since the novel was first published, but it still gathers attention in the academic corridor. The diversity and range of reactions this novel garners warrants a collection of contemporary voices.

The essays are divided under four broad heads, facilitating the reader’s entry into the text. The first broad head is ‘Context’, which integrates four broad framing essays that introduce the settings of the novel. The first, ‘Looking for Mr Biswas’, by John Thieme, a critic inseparably associated with Naipaulia, writes about the use of the central trope of the house and Biswas’s struggle to become a householder. He relates this to his own experience of visiting a couple of the originals of the houses in the novel when he was researching his book on Naipaul, and particularly to his recollections of meeting Naipaul’s mother in the final ‘Jerry built’ house. Thieme considers how the real life experience on which the novel is based was transformed into fiction, and in so doing attempts a revaluation of Homi Bhabha’s reading of the novel.

Like Thieme, who was looking for ‘Mr Biswas’, Harish Trivedi, too, in ‘The Many Houses for Mr Naipaul’, embarks on an ‘academic pilgrimage’. Trivedi voices an ‘Indian’ standpoint, and while doing so he engages on a new exploration of the trope of the house and home. In the process, he had a *darshan* of Naipaul’s successive homes, especially the two Naipaul inhabited in the formative early years. He brings together details of Naipaul’s own lineage and ancestry, his travels, and his life as adumbrated in his authorised biography, *The World is What It is* (2008) by Patrick French.

The third essay is by Vijay Mishra, who shares the history of indenture with Naipaul: his ancestors moved to Fiji while Naipaul’s had gone to the West Indies. Little wonder that he puts Naipaul and the house in the exclusive perspective of ‘Plantation Culture’. His research shows how space functions as a signifier both for indenture history and the loss of an earlier space from which one is unceremoniously ripped. He looks house as a metonym as well as metaphor.

Following this comes the real insider’s perspective: like Naipaul, like Biswas, Vijay Maharaj is a West Indian of Indian descent. She dares venture to read *A House for Mr Biswas* through the lens of creolisiation – as a respectability–reputation conundrum – to gain a better understanding of Biswas’s characterisation and deepen awareness of Indo-Caribbean relationships to creolisation. This approach generates a new understanding of the literary text even as it yields insight into the many phases of creolisation, especially those developed among Indo-Trinidadians and, by extension undoubtedly, Indo-Caribbeans. It also provides a stance on Indo-Caribbean position in relation to discourse of creolisation. Furthermore, in so

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1 *Darshan* is a Hindi word ‘to have sight, visit or view’, used in the essay by Harish Trivedi (47).
doing, it permits interrogation of creolisation theses and thereby extends the work of theorising creolisation as the fashioning of cultural identity in which all Caribbean people are involved.

In her essay, ‘Foundation Acts: Enunciating a West Indian Literary Tradition’, Cameron Bushnell too focuses on creolisation. A special emphasis is on the linguistic hybridity and cultural amalgamation which is part of Trinidad identity formation. This essay reads the novel as the site of the efforts of the exilic consciousness to achieve autonomy and individuation while making an unwilled and unconscious departure from the past. This essay also identifies a dual movement – towards foundation and towards exile – in both patent and covert aspects of the novel and the author’s other writings and statements. This thus makes Naipaul’s work foundational for future West Indian voices by establishing a new tradition of West Indian literature which makes Biswas a narrative of the past even while it simultaneously makes a radical break with the very past it narrates.

The next section, Text, zeroes in on the novel, each piece picking on one or another salient, defining aspect. Meenakshi Bharat’s essay, ‘Colonial Maladies, Postcolonial Cures’, pinpoints the recurring motif of illness in the novel, which she feels ‘opens a window to chronicle the history of a society that seems to be intrinsically and endemically sick’ (119). This novel analysis is revelatory of how sickness is made to serve different narrative functions in the novel. Savi Munjal’s argument is rooted in an understanding of fiction as historiography. She argues that to the twenty-first-century post-Foucauldian scholar, for whom the gap between fact and storytelling has crumbled, Naipaul’s novel ‘tells’ the history of an age of political and social change, and finally celebrates the creation of a new epistemological space with the acquisition of a house for Mr Biswas. She feels Naipaul’s novel provides an extremely nuanced articulation of the postcolonial concept of cultural liminality by dwelling on the inherent interstitiality of the postcolonial subject, in the character of Mr Biswas.

Debaditya Bhattacharya’s essay ‘A Father Among Many Others: Re-reading A House for Mr Biswas’ is a departure from the ongoing discourse on the diasporic dilemma and its relationship with the issues of ‘home’ and ‘belonging’ in Biswas. He takes an entirely different viewpoint by looking at it not as an account of the ‘search for communal roots’ but as a record of an entry into private economies of space. He argues that the entire text is structured as a classic Freudian narrative of the appreciation of the role of the father by the parricidal subject, Biswas.

Florence Labaune-Demeule’s essay analyses Biswas’s spatial quest alongside the protagonist’s narrative quest for personal independence. The essay looks into the question of displacement not only from the angle of Biswas’s geographical quest for a house and a home to live, but also in the light of his more intellectual and sentimental pursuit of happiness through writing and painting, the only means which could help him try and escape from his surrounding stifling reality. Neil ten Kortenaar too, focussing on the acts of reading and writing in the novel, points out the importance of textuality in everyday Trinidad, in the almanac, the birth certificate, the labels of products and inbooks, newspapers and legal documents. His essay, ‘Mr Biswas Finds a Home in the World on Paper’, looks closely at the different varieties of writing – sign painting, journalism and literary attempts – that define the life of Mr Biswas. In ‘The Rhetoric of Alienation and Separation’, Gregory Wilson argues that Naipaul portrays alienation from one’s society as critical to one’s effectiveness and understanding of both that society and oneself, particularly in his early writing when he

is situating himself as a successful West Indian author in exile.

The section ‘Text and Texts’ attempts to analyse *A House for Mr Biswas* in juxtaposition with other texts. Gillian Dooley sees the ‘transformations of childhood memories’ as a staple component of West Indian creative writing and she chooses to see Naipaul’s *Biswas* and Jamaica Kincaid’s *Annie John* as examples of ‘looking back in anger’. Meenakshi Mukherjee compares Naipaul’s novel with Bibhutibhushan Bandopadhyay’s *Pather Panchali*, a novel written in Bengali some three decades earlier with which it has striking similarities. She argues that the effects of colonial education were invariably mediated by the existing realities of the receiving culture. For alibis, she identifies the obvious motifs of ‘The House and the Road’ representing ‘Two Modes of Autobiographical Fiction’, seeing them as offering an entry point to the understanding of two different but similar cultures.

The last section, ‘After-Text,’ closes the volume with Ratna Raman’s critical/fictional feminist take on the novel from the perspective of the protagonist’s wife, Shama. Getting ironical inspiration from the literary spats generated by his lashing out at female authors as being sentimental and ‘unequal’ to him, ‘No House for Shama Biswas’ seeks to confront the ‘misogynist sexual politics’ that colour Naipaul’s work.

Despite the fact that almost a dozen novels have followed *A House for Mr Biswas*, it still remains Naipaul’s most notable. The warm, sympathetic recognition of the essential alienation of man given the ironical treatment enhances the achievement of the novel. In true epic style, it does what the Nobel Citation applauded in his work: it recognises him for highlighting ‘suppressed histories’ and for becoming the ‘narrator’ of what ‘others have forgotten, the history of the vanquished’. This collection of accomplished essays attempts to throw rare light on the novel by accessing these suppressions and thus to find a new house for *Mr Biswas*. Together they make for an invaluable collection of fresh insights into the novel.

Vivek Kumar Dwivedi

For over a quarter of a century, Gayatri Spivak’s scholarship has remained at the forefront of postcolonial studies, pushing the discipline forward, asking the uncomfortable questions, and engaging in spirited debates. Spivak’s 1988 essay, ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’ launched her into academic prominence, and while the essay still is regarded as enormously influential, unfortunately, it often overshadows many of her other important works, which is why her recent book, *An Aesthetic of Education in the Era of Globalization*, published by Harvard University Press, is such a welcome reminder of her varied and important contributions. The 25 essays, spanning nearly an equal number of years, not only reveal Spivak’s unwavering commitment to an ethical, aesthetic engagement with literature (and the world) as a way of fulfilling the humanities’ promise to contest the logic of capital, but also they reveal her enormous capacity as a teacher.

In the preface and introduction, Spivak informs readers that she writes now with a ‘desperate honesty’ and that doubt will be her guiding refrain (x). From the outset, it is clear that she is concerned deeply by ‘this era of the mantra of hope’ and deploys doubt, which she sees as a great inheritance of the Enlightenment, as a way to recuperate the aesthetic (1). This meditation on the aesthetic gives the collection a thematic thread for readers to grasp as they move through the essays. Additionally, running throughout the collection is the frame of the double bind. Spivak instructs readers to keep this structure in mind while engaging with the essays as it reveals the tensions that undergird many of her arguments. Ultimately Spivak’s work attempts to displace globalisation’s hold on information, data, and capital through a ‘productive undoing’ of the legacy of the aesthetic coupled with the structure of the double bind (1). At times this lofty project is undermined by a determined insistence to use the double bind framework even when the fit isn’t comfortable, leading to several unnecessarily opaque moments. The introduction also is mired in a selected history of the double bind that contain large tracts of quoted text, with little exposition, that divert readers from Spivak’s more urgent claims. To be fair, Spivak asks for ‘an interactive reader’ that is willing to take this journey with her in which the ‘reconsiderations and realizations’ of the introduction are not always expounded in the essays themselves (3).

The book is not divided into sections, but there are narratives that reflect a progression of ideas. Spivak’s essays transition fluidly from issues of difference to translation to disciplinary concerns. Throughout these movements, readers will observe Spivak’s willingness to draw from intimate, often private moments to forward a thesis. It is this vulnerability that reveals the stakes of Spivak’s work. The most striking moment of intimacy occurs in the final chapter, ‘Tracing the Skin of Day,’ Spivak takes readers on her journey to view Chittrovanu Mazumdar’s *Nightskin*. We walk with Spivak through the museum, and it is here that Spivak brings her discussion of the aesthetic to a close, remarking how ‘in the visual, the lesson of reading is the toughest’ (507). Spivak offers a poststructural meditation on Mazumdar’s artwork, suggesting that his work ‘protects the trace away from the promise of the sign’ leaving viewers ‘with no guarantees’ (502). This concluding image of the trace in Mazumdar’s artwork seems a fitting way to end the collection as it provides a space for the undoing of the certainty of the logic of global capitalism.

Many of the essays contain the presence of two voices from Spivak: the one used to write an essay or lecture at a particular moment and the one introducing or commenting on the piece from the present. She uses slightly different dynamics to navigate the two voices in each essay, but too often Spivak’s present day voice directs readers on how a particular selection fits her double bind theme. As such, the relationships between the works take on less of an organic connection and more of a managed feel. One essay, ‘The Double Bind Starts to Kick In,’ stands out as a prominent example of this on-going negotiation. In this essay, Spivak inserts her present-day position ‘as a running parenthetical commentary’ (97). While at times it can be insightful to observe this conversation between Spivak today and an earlier Spivak because it illustrates a development in her thinking, the original iteration of the thought becomes obscured or even dismissed by this extra layer of commentary. Another example of this guiding voice occurs at the beginning of ‘Ethics and Politics in Tagore, Coetzee, and Certain Scenes of Teaching,’ in which Spivak suggests readers ‘read it [the essay] with bemusement […] and a suspicion of golden-ageist culturalisms’ (316). This rhetorical move puts readers in an awkward position as they attempt to engage with her ideas, but then again, Spivak has been putting readers in awkward intellectual situations for years.

The book spans over 500 pages, but it is not the volume of words that leaves a lasting impression, it is often the turn of a phrase or an observation that gives readers pause for thought. For instance, in ‘Reading with Stuart Hall in “Pure” Literary Terms’, Spivak makes the case for literature as the locus of ethics and in two powerful sentences. She suggests that ‘the ethical situation can only be figured in the ethical experience of the impossible. And literature, as a play of figures, can give us access to the experience’ (352). Embedded in these lines are the roots of the type of aesthetic education that she argues for in the introduction. In other words, this is not a book to tackle all at once; instead, in smaller increments it can serve as a space for contemplation as well as consternation but always with the reminder of the transformative possibilities of an aesthetic education.

Spivak often gets positioned as a cynic, and many times rightfully so, but to view her in this one-dimensional light is unfair and uninformed. A hallmark of her scholarship is her understanding of the implications these theoretical approaches have on the material realities of individuals and groups. That ethical imperative resurfaces time and time again in An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization. By putting these essays side by side, readers can see the importance of Spivak’s work as on-going commitment to ‘an aesthetic education for everyone’ (122). This democratising approach to education is the quiet hope that that this book instills in readers. An Aesthetic of Education in the Era of Globalization takes up the ceaseless struggle to exhibit the necessity of the humanities in an era of globalisation.

Alexander Hartwiger

The theme of white settler children being lost-in-the-bush has been a recurring one in Australian literature and film. In her book, *White Vanishing: Rethinking Australia’s Lost-in-the-Bush Myth*, Elspeth Tilley offers a new way of looking at this trope by incorporating postcolonial theory, including whiteness theory. This new way sees the lost-in-the-bush narratives in terms of white-vanishing, where the ‘indigene’ is ignored or displaced. Tilley explains the term ‘indigene’ as white culture’s imagining of Indigenous Australians (18).

Tilley outlines the literary history of the child lost-in-the-bush narratives beginning with nineteenth-century references to lost children in novels and short stories. The first critical study of the lost-in-the-bush theme was by John Scheteckter in 1981, and in 1999 Peter Pierce’s *The Country of Lost Children* focused specifically on the lost child and the trope of loss of innocence in early Australian white settler society. Tilley points out that Pierce’s collection also includes lost adults, and she sees a similar pattern in the depiction of both lost children and adults as representing ‘an Australian anxiety’ (26). Tilley, however, argues further that claiming the lost-in-the-bush trope as ‘Australian’ is in effect ‘forgetting and displacing the non-white’ (53). *White Vanishing* sets out to explore the ‘missing contents’ (44) or in the postcolonial sense what lies beyond the frame. What happens to the indigene in the form of ‘black displacement’ (55) in the lost-in-the-bush narrative is the book’s main concern.

Chapter two, ‘Black Displacement’, includes the depiction of the black tracker in Australian literature and film. Tilley sees the literary role of this character as serving the needs of white society to perpetuate the concept of an unknown and unknowable world. The trackers are not depicted ‘as humans in their own right’ (73). She also points out that while the black tracker traces the lost white child, he is not seen to be the one to restore the child to its parents. Rather, white people are foregrounded at the point of rescue and return. The black tracker is often depicted as animal-like. His skills are often seen as natural, rather than skills developed through ‘a learned system of knowledge’ (76). Most black trackers remain unnamed. In chapter three, Tilley examines that other Australian trope, mateship, as exclusively white and where male and female are bonded together in the lost-in-the-bush stories to the exclusion of ‘Indigenous sovereignty and internal diversity’ (131).

The lost-in-the-bush dramatic theme of crossing temporal boundaries is, for Tilley, yet another way in which Indigenous Australians are made invisible. She explores this in ‘Temporal Trouble’, chapter four. Indigenous Australians live in this other world, and so they can be seen not to belong in modern Australia. In ‘Entering Terra Nullius’, chapter five, Tilley examines the masculine-controlled white spaces with roads and fences that keep white Australia ‘safe’ (203). Beyond the roads and fences are indigenes ‘either passive and compliant or savage and hostile’ (324). Ultimately, Tilley argues that these Australian stories are more than just stories. She concludes by posing the question of the extent to which such depictions and omissions of Indigenous Australia have affected government policy and political action.

Although Tilley claims in her Preface that the book is not about what is ‘wrong’ (ix) with Australian literature but more a way to examine our thinking about the value of Indigenous Australians, in her Conclusion, she posits that white society has been denied the
opportunity to learn about bush survival methods because the lost-in-the-bush trope is premised on the hapless white person facing the unfamiliar and strange. She suggests that a different narrative would have recognised Indigenous Australians. This is true; however, had Australia, indeed, been a terra nullius, it is still likely that the lost-in-the-bush stories would have been written. We respond collectively to the terrors of being lost. The nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature Tilley explores for her theme used the lost-in-the-bush trope for dramatic effect and for that to succeed dichotomies were required. She is correct in claiming that no lost-in-the-bush text has subverted ‘the empire’ (328) and that ‘irrational fear and strident othering’ continues into modern narratives such as the disappearance of Azaria Chamberlain and Peter Falconio (329).

Tilley published some of this work in 2011 as an ejournal chapter on ‘Critical Whiteness’ for the Australian Critical Race and Whiteness Studies Association. Both this chapter and Tilley’s book White Vanishing stem from her 2011 PhD thesis. I mention this only because White Vanishing, compared to the ejournal chapter, makes for heavy reading. The jargon is extensive and the lengthy footnotes can be overwhelming at times: footnote 34, for example, runs over two pages. The retail price is around $170, so it is unlikely that many individual copies will be sold – copies other than to university libraries. It deserves to be converted into an ebook, so more readers can appreciate the scholarship involved.

Dymphna Lonergan

Michèle Grossman’s *Entangled Subjects: Indigenous / Australian Cross-Cultures of Talk, Text and Modernity* explores, as the very title of the book suggests, issues of ‘talk’ and ‘text’ in the area of contemporary collaborative Indigenous Australian writing. This work represents a continuation of Grossman’s scholarly work on cross-cultural research and Indigenous Australian writing and representation, highlighting important debates and issues surrounding this complex and important field of inquiry. Grossman untangles her topic eloquently using compelling argumentation and generous referencing. Positioning her research in the context of her own cultural history, location and privileges, as well as her previous academic work, Grossman exposes and intervenes in current debates surrounding ‘orality’ and ‘literacy’ and their problematic rendering as dichotomies.

In her ‘Introduction’, Grossman discusses the complexity and the socio-historical and political underpinnings of ‘orality’ and ‘literacy’ figured as ‘vexed’ terms. She discusses the identification of literacy with the rise and development of Western modernity as a way of demarcating the ‘civilized’ and the ‘primitive’. Engaging with contemporary discourses on literacy, Grossman criticises certain social anthropologists whose work contributed to associating ‘orality’ with premodern and primitive forms of cognition which are in turn ‘transformed’ by acquisition of literacy.

Chapter One, entitled ‘Unsettling Subjects: Critical Perspectives on Selves in Writing and Writing Selves’, continues the discussion on the written word in a cross-cultural setting. Grossman sees Indigenous Australian cultures of the written word as both constituted by and resistant to paradigms of Western-based knowledge and representation. As a direct consequence of colonialism and imperialism, Aborigines are amongst the most researched and the most heavily textualised peoples in the world, with Western scientists writing about them without even visiting the continent, as a part of, in Grossman’s own words, the ‘bid for advancing and refining the central, globalizing narratives of modernity’. Within this context, the introduction of literacy carries a particular historical burden of imperial domination, dispossession, repression and disenfranchising Aboriginal ways of viewing and being in the world. Nonetheless, Grossman argues that writing and literacy are not primarily or merely ‘tainted fruits of the imperial tree’ for Indigenous peoples, either in Australia or elsewhere. Challenging attitudes that the process of decolonisation necessarily involves a complete repudiation of the coloniser’s language, Grossman draws from numerous Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander intellectuals and writers who use this language for various emancipatory, revolutionary and cultural projects and aims, highlighting the ways in which the Indigenous peoples have interacted with and made their own systems of writing and literacy-based forms of knowledge. Continuing with a critique of a popular trope constructing Aboriginal culture and people as ‘naturally oral’ Grossman challenges the very concept of ‘nature’ which govern the discourses of ‘primitivity’. Associating Aboriginal culture with a monolithic view of ‘orality’ serves to perpetuate discourses of authenticity, contrasting ‘nature’ (as ‘oral’ or ‘Aboriginal’) and ‘civilisation’ (as the ‘literate West’). Grossman sees this identification with the natural as part of a neo-colonial and ahistorical project which maintain hierarchies and oppressions.

Chapter Two, entitled ‘(Re)writing Histories: The Emergence and Development of


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Indigenous Australian Life Writing’, focuses on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander life-writing figured as relevant genres for Indigenous Australians in which they re-write hegemonic historical accounts of invasion and settlement, intervening in historical accounts with their own perspectives. The chapter also engages with an influential essay by Stephen Muecke which generated a great deal of debate. The essay criticises the ‘repressive / expressive’ matrix which according to Muecke constituted a great deal of early theoretical analyses of Indigenous Australian life-writing. Grossman engages with the critical responses to the essay and offers her own reading of its meaning and influence. Using Foucault’s term of ‘dispersed genealogies’ applied to Indigenous Australian life writing, Grossman underscores the importance of the essay in its refusal to provide a homogenous theory, offering instead multiple locations of the emergence of the genre.

In Chapter Five entitled ‘Gularabulu: Stories of West Kimberley’, Grossman returns to the discussions of ‘orality’ and the damaging discourses of primitivity. She finds that the idea of ‘progress’ and ‘civilization’, when figured teleologically, (along with the ‘rise’ of modernity) poses problems in its inability to account for the persistence of oral modes of production without resorting to primitivity and perpetuating binaries. Arguing for a consideration of the complex interconnections between oral and textual modes of Aboriginal production, Grossman explores how these two intersect in a specific historical and cross-cultural setting. This way, Grossman moves from a problematic ahistoricism that homogenises Aboriginal experiences and ignores the role of literacy around issues of Aboriginal struggles and rights.

Using the examples of Indigenous and non-Indigenous authors and editors and examining their collaborations as sites of tension, encounter and exchange that are never neutral and frequently vexed, Grossman’s work intervenes and contributes to discussions surrounding Indigenous Australian writing and the critical and scholarly attention it inspires. Engaging with certain theories and arguments, Grossman complicates ideas surrounding orality and literacy to reveal complexities, historical junctures, meeting points and dynamic entanglements.

Maja Milatovic
Presumed Incompetent: the Intersections of Race and Class for Women in Academia
edited by Gabriella Gutierrez y Muhs, Yolanda Flores Niemann, Carmen G. Gonzalez, and Angela P. Harris (Utah State University Press, 2012)

Presumed Incompetent: The Intersections of Race and Class for Women in Academia, an anthology of personal narratives by academics of colour, takes its title from the work’s central concern: the presumption of incompetence formulated as a direct consequence of inequality and intersections of racist and sexist discrimination in academia. Relentlessly problematising the United States higher education system, its increasing marketisation, recruitment and diversity policies, these deeply personal narratives reveal the experiences of women of colour working in this context, their struggles as well as dedication and persistence. As the editors claim in their Introduction, the volume is intended to be read as ‘framework for understanding the contradictory culture of academia’ (1). This contradiction at the heart of academic life lies in its emphasis on meritocracy, neutrality and dissemination of knowledge for the betterment of society. However, the large amount of empirical data suggests that inequality, discrimination and inaccessibility to educational resources remain a constant yet frequently denied issue.

The anthology is divided into thematically diverse sections such on-campus climate, relationships between students and faculty, forming networks of allies, issues of social class in academia, tenure and promotion. This diverse approach allows a particular multiplicity of perspectives, made possible through an intersectional approach taking into account the diversity of experiences while at the same time establishing structural connections between each individual narrative. Each of these sections is prefaced by an individual introduction, describing the section to follow and anticipating its most crucial concerns.

Introducing the anthology, Angela P. Harris and Carmen G. Gonzalez engage with racism in academia, obscured by various national myths such as the belief in meritocracy and upward mobility. Engaging with institutional whiteness evidenced by the predominance of white individuals in higher education, Harris and Gonzales contextualise their discussion by reflecting on the increasing corporatisation of universities and its features such as a customer-service model of education, increasing casualisation of staff and forming partnerships with profit-making industries and businesses while cutting down on non-profit generating fields such as the humanities. Furthermore, the editors explain their preference of qualitative empirical data such as surveys and interviews, framing their choice of using personal narratives to expose racism and sexism in academia in the following words: ‘Storytelling by individuals, when done well, packs an emotional punch and provides the psychological detail necessary to understand a person with a very different life experiences’ (3). Indeed, these experiences are reflected in the sheer variety of stories gathered in this volume. However, this is also a work in which ‘absences speak’, as the editors include a ‘Note on the Silences Shouting from Within This Anthology’, which reflects on those who shared their stories but decided not to publish due to vulnerability, fear of discrimination, hostility and retaliation, threatening their reputation as well as embarrassing their colleagues (11).

In my view, one of the most important aspects of this anthology is its intersectional and multivoiced approach and concerns, evidenced by a variety of experiences and perspectives touching upon white privilege, tokenism, classism, racial and sexual bias and prejudice as well as culturally-specific challenges. For instance, Angela May Kupenda’s
article ‘Facing Down the Spooks’ engages with the lack of solidarity between the predominantly white staff and staff of colour. Kupenda’s article details her experiences with white women academics ready to support her on the basis of their shared gender but failing to understand how racism impacts women academics of colour. Kupenda sees the issue of unacknowledged and unmeritocratic white privilege as a crucial obstacle to forming alliances across race and gender and understanding how racism impacts people of colour. Her contribution warns us against enthusiastic assumptions of solidarity based on unacknowledged inequalities and power relations. Continuing the discussion on white privilege is Stephanie A. Shields’ ‘Waking up to Privilege: Intersectionality and Opportunity’ where she reflects on her experiences as a white academic and scrutinises her socialisation in a society where whiteness is defined as the invisible, all-encompassing norm.

Highlighting issues of class, Serena Easton’s contribution ‘On Being Special’ reflects on her Black middle-class privileges as a child, including believing she was ‘special’ and therefore immune to discrimination. However, Easton details her disillusionment on entering academia, as she faces prejudice, exclusion and continuous assumptions of incompetence. Another class perspective comes from Constance G. Anthony’s narrative ‘The Port Hueneme of My Mind: The Geography of Working Class Consciousness in One Academic Career’, revealing her experiences as a working class individual in a privileged context filled with exclusionary codes of conduct. Crucially, Anthony’s experiences point to the practices in academia which single out those coming from less privileged backgrounds, alienating them for mispronouncing challenging words or confusing certain social cues.

Reflecting on tokenism and discrimination, Michelle M. Jacob reveals the challenges of being the only Native American faculty member in her poignant narrative ‘Native Women Maintaining Their Culture in the White Academy’, highlighting three main issues faced by Native minority staff: an extreme sense of isolation, tokenism and tremendous service burdens (242). Yolanda Flores Niemann also discusses tokenism and lack of representation in ‘The Making of a Token: A Case Study of Stereotype Threat, Stigma, Racism an Tokenism in Academe’, revealing discriminatory hiring practices and her unprecedented teaching and advising workload which she aptly calls ‘undermining by workload’ (544).

Apart from University staff, colleagues and administrators, a great many of these contributions discuss the academics’ relationships with students. For instance, Carmen R. Lugo-Lugo’s ‘A Prostitute, a Servant, and a Customer-Service Representative’ contextualises these issues by exploring the impact of corporatisation on academics of colour, detailing how the customer-service model particularly affects faculty of colour. Lugo-Lugo highlights the assumption of competence automatically assigned to white male staff members, contrasting it to negative stereotypical images frequently attached to ethnic faculty members, exacerbating the presumption of incompetence. Sheree Wilson makes a similar observation in ‘They Forgot Mammy Had a Brain’, exploring the ‘Mammy’ stereotype attached to certain African American women faculty and administrators, expecting them to undertake various nurturing and caretaker roles and thus hindering their professional development.

Finally, it is important to highlight that each of these personal narratives is infused with healing and reassuring words as well as transformative possibilities and strategies of forming alliances. Nurturing interpersonal and professional relationships and persevering in difficult conditions, this important and courageous collection offers a sense of community, support and hope for the future. Using storytelling as means of exposing discriminatory practices and narrating personal experiences, Presumed Incompetent is accessible, inspiring
and engaging reading. With its emphasis on intersectionality and breaking silences and its constructive contributions to feminism, critical race and whiteness studies, equality and diversity, this anthology is a necessary read for both academics and students invested with antiracism, decolonising practices and equality.

Maja Milatovic

Geordie Williamson won the Pascall Prize for Critical Writing in 2011. This prestigious award is given to an Australian who makes a significant contribution to the arts, to the flow of critical and cultural debate in our country. The judges praised him for ‘the quality of his prose – often beautiful and striking – and his light touch with big ideas.’¹ As chief literary critic of the *Australian*, Williamson engages a wide audience with his astute, well-balanced reviews and penetrating literary criticism.

The focus of his latest work is the state of Australian literature. *The Burning Library* is subtitled ‘our great novelists lost and found’, and the book is an eloquent plea for more awareness, attention and respect for our country’s writers and their work. If we accept, as Williamson does, that a national literature can teach us about ourselves and our place in the world, then this is certainly an aim worth embracing.

Geordie Williamson is not afraid of provoking controversy. ‘Who killed Australian literature?’ is the catchcry of his argument: the library is burning, going up in flames. He cites changing pedagogical values in university teaching, the commercialism of Australian publishers and shrinking library budgets as instrumental in this decline. Then he attempts to redress it in his insightful study of fourteen twentieth-century Australian novelists:

> *The Burning Library* is an attempt to reconstitute a lost back-story of our literature. It is braided from the lives and works of authors who have been underestimated or discredited by ways of thinking about literature instituted in recent decades. The novels it celebrates exist today in the samizdat of perfect indifference; they were harvested from charity shop bargain bins and eBay shopfronts, library stacks and the further reaches of friends’ bookshelves. Up until recent months … many of the works it examined were out of print. (8)

The novelists range from the prize-winning and famous (Patrick White, Christina Stead, Thomas Kenneally) to lesser-known writers like M. Barnard Eldershaw, Elizabeth Harrower and Randolph Stow. Devoting a chapter to each author, Williamson makes a strong case for the reading and re-examination of their work, closely analysing one or two of the texts. His enthusiasm is erudite and contagious. He describes White’s *The Hanging Garden* (2012) as a fine example of the novelist’s ‘gnarled baroque style’ and praises Randolph Stow’s *The Girl Green as Elderflower* (1980), ‘as eccentric as it is magnificently achieved’. He advocates a re-reading of Christina Stead’s *Letty Fox* (1946) because it ‘provides the most spectacular, sustained and representative instance of the novelist’s method: a huge and lurid blazon for her implausible art’ (53).

This is a book of elegant essays rather than a work of non-fiction to be read from cover to cover. I enjoyed picking and choosing from the individual studies, beginning with the work of the writers I knew well and then branching into less familiar territory. Geordie Williamson’s ‘personal triumvirate’ of Australian authors is Patrick White, Christina Stead and Randolph Stow. I studied Australian literature at the University of Adelaide in the 1980s,


and my most-loved women writers from this time are Christina Stead, Shirley Hazzard and Elizabeth Harrower. Hazzard is not featured in *The Burning Library*, except for a mention in the bibliography of ‘Other books you might like’, but the thoughtful essays on Stead and Harrower are a pleasure to read.

Elizabeth Harrower is an interesting case study in Williamson’s argument that we have neglected our literary treasures. Since its recent reprinting in the Text Classics series, Harrower’s 1966 novel, *The Watch Tower* has come ‘rampaging back from decades of disgraceful neglect’.2 Media presenters and writers like Jennifer Byrne, Ramona Koval and Michelle de Kretser are introducing it to a new generation of readers as a ‘forgotten gem’ and a neglected classic. While I am delighted that Harrower’s work will now be reprinted – Text Publishing is reissuing *Down in the City* (1957) and *The Long Prospect* (1958) – I am surprised by the furore surrounding this ‘rediscovery’. Harrower’s gothic novels were praised by Christina Stead and studied in Australian literature courses in the mid-twentieth century. Her work was reviewed in journals like *Quadrant*, *Meanjin* and *Southerly* and discussed in edited collections such as *Who is she?: images of women in Australian fiction* (1983) and *Gender, Politics and Fiction* (1992). Her four novels are available in libraries throughout Australia. How can they have slipped so completely from our view?

Williamson asks the same question about all of the novels in *The Burning Library*, as he argues for new discussions and fresh assessment of the work:

There is much to justify renewed attention to the authors and works … as models of style and form; as documents of honesty and integrity to balance against the mendacity of political narrative; as carriers of knowledge about people, a vivid gallery of Australian selves; and, at their best, as vessels of a beauty and a strangeness that elude any final, fixed meaning that might be turned to ideology’s ends, yet give pleasure to those who engage with reading as the joy, entire unto itself, of one mind meeting another (11).

As a librarian and reader of Australian literature, I whole-heartedly support Geordie Williamson’s aim of truly valuing our best literary works and making them more accessible. Let’s join him in this challenge. If you begin by reading the essays in *The Burning Library*, and then re-reading and discussing some of the wonderful authors whose work he praises here, that will be another step forward.

Jennifer Osborn

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Emma Dawson Varughese’s *Reading New India* is an introduction to the post-2000 Indian fiction in English published within India and an attempt to read contemporary India in and through this literature. As declared in the preface, Varughese’s aim is ‘to consider this fiction against the earlier notions of Indian literature in English’ as postcolonial and ‘against the contemporary socio-cultural landscape of New India’ that has undergone immense changes in the 65 years since independence to become a major presence in the global economy. *Reading New India* ‘engages with the idea of sociology of literature’ (18) where literature is a reflection of and on the socio-cultural changes in the society from which it is produced. The language in which the literature is written is at once a part of these changes through its changing relationship with that society and a means to explore and express the changes.

From Varughese’s website¹ it is obvious that *Reading New India* is part of a wider, ongoing project on literatures in English from countries where English is either a colonial legacy now gone native or a language adopted for its power to allow participation in the global exchanges. The foundation of Varughese’s project is Bruj Kachru’s model of World Englishes that organises the Anglophone world in three circles: the Inner circle of countries where English is a native language, the Outer circle of countries where English is a native language, the Outer circle of countries where English is a former colonial legacy which has since become official or unofficial second language connecting different (vernacular) linguistic communities, and the Expanding circle of countries where English is a widely used foreign language.

In *New Departures, New Worlds: World Englishes Literature*, explaining the term ‘World Englishes Literature’, Varughese states that

> World Englishes writers are less and less interested in their putative subalternity to a former colonial power and more and more interested in what constitutes (often positively) the identity of the culture from within which they write. Similarly, they are less and less likely to worry as to the relation of the English they use to the notionally ‘original’ English of the Inner circle. I might therefore best encapsulate my definition as follows: Most (but not all) World Englishes literature explores the culture(s) of the country and people from which it is written (these countries belong to Kachru’s Outer and Expanding circles); usually the literature employs the English of that place (to a lesser or greater degree); and, moreover, the writer chooses to write in that English over other languages in which she could alternatively write.²

Varughese wishes to go beyond the confines of the label ‘postcolonial’ to make the global audience aware of the diversity of the growing body of literatures in English from various parts of the former British Empire and of the larger Anglophone world. Her earlier work *Beyond the Postcolonial: World Englishes Literature* provides a fuller explanation of the project and the theoretical framework applied to it. *Beyond the Postcolonial* looks at literatures from four African and three Asian countries, directing attention towards the fact

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¹ [http://www.beyondthepostcolonial.com/](http://www.beyondthepostcolonial.com/)


that Postcolonial texts form only a part, even if a significant part, of this diverse whole. It asserts that these literatures and cultures have moved away from their post/colonial past towards new identities and new experiences. The plural Englishes signifies the individuality of the English of each of these literatures gained through its interaction with the culture and the other (vernacular) languages of each literature’s locale. Reading New India is one of the case studies in Varughese’s project with a more detailed focus on India and is probably better read alongside Beyond the Postcolonial.

Indian English Literature has been a global phenomenon for a long time. Many of its star writers have won literary awards and critical recognition. The provenance of this literature has always been diverse, with writers writing from within India and Indian diasporas around the world, and so have been its concerns; yet the images of the Indian English literature as postcolonial and Indian English writer as migrant remain predominant. The individuality of Reading New India is in its desire to go beyond the postcolonial label and its refusal to include diasporic writers and texts in its scope as it brings to notice the increasing number and diversity (of genres and forms) of Indian fiction in English produced, published and read mainly within India, and which remains mostly unavailable and unknown to the outside world.

The introductory chapter of Reading New India explains the focus of the book and gives an overview of the changes in the post-independence India and in the concept of being Indian and an overview of the earlier, ‘postcolonial’ Indian English literature and its major writers. The next six chapters try to contextualise and trace various trends in the postmillennial literature such as Chicklit, Cricklit, Crime fiction, Urban fiction, Gay narratives, Graphic novels, fantasy and epic narratives. These chapters also include close readings of selected texts of each type. In the concluding chapter, Varughese acknowledges that the ‘newness’ of the body of fiction presented in the book, its proximity and variety make it difficult to predict ‘exactly how the genre themes and forms outlined ... in this book play out and develop over time’ (150), and ponders the future of the Indian English literature in view of India’s increasing contact with the world and the fact that global economies are increasingly affecting India.

Although the aim and the focus of the book are laudatory, the book is quite repetitive and thinly spread in many places. The glossary of cultural terms and abbreviations and the chronological timeline are unnecessary for the Indian audience, as Varughese acknowledges in the preface, and in their brevity inadequate for those unfamiliar with India. The overview of the ‘postcolonial’ Indian English literature has gaping holes as it leaves out prominent writers such as Salman Rushdie and Arundhati Roy. Varughese’s selection is quite biased towards texts representing the Urban India; leaving one with the impression that none of this ‘new fiction’ deals with non-urban India or the newness of the New India is only to be found in its big cities. The bias is also evident in the inclusion of certain writers such as Chetan Bhagat, neither unavailable nor unknown outside India, and exclusion of certain major postmillennial writers such as Tarun Tejpal who writes from within India and is simultaneously published in India and elsewhere.

The book also suffers at the level of editing. There is a significant factual error in the introduction. In the explanation of the cultural and religious backdrop to Sarojini Naidu’s poem Song of Radha, The Milkmaid Varughese places the Mathura shrine of Govinda (Lord Krishna) aside the sacred river Ganges (7) instead of river Yamuna or Jamuna. The book has a number of confused expressions and poorly constructed sentences such as ‘Sophie’s
identity and connection with Bangalore is also caught up with her identity with India’ (31). ‘Sophie is raised Hindi and English speaking in Khasi-speaking Shillong’ (31). ‘Misha and Anushka do not follow this protocol, breaking their fast with alcohol, rich "European foods" and a gay couple’ (49).

Notwithstanding the abovementioned shortcomings, Reading New India provides a much needed and timely introduction to postmillennial India and Indian English literature within India as they move beyond the postcolonial past and forward into ‘Newness’.

Ashwinee Pendharkar

*The Review of Contemporary Literature* is a literary magazine founded by the editor John O’Brien with John Byrne and Lowell Dunlap. It emphasises contemporary literary fiction and aesthetics: postmodern, experimental, avant-garde, metafictional, subversive. This particular special edition focuses on the Irish writer Flann O’Brien on the occasion of his 100th birthday in 2011. It comprises 16 essays, each a reflection on an aspect of his creative or critical work, with a useful introduction and followed by the contributors’ biographies – a cosmopolitan bunch – plus 28 heterogeneous, quirky and inventive book reviews on both fiction and nonfiction and sundry promotions of the Dalkey Archive listings.

O’Brien’s best-known novel, *The Third Policeman* (1940), features the figurative presence of a bicycle. The front cover of this *Review* depicts a bicycle motif in abstraction, the wheels outstanding in high modernist style and colour, while also presenting an impression of the mechanical arc and angle configuration of a sextant. The image connotes a fusion; scientific discovery and technology are grafted onto the arcane foundational wisdoms of the cosmos, in order to determine the positioning of the subject on a grid of the modern world. The reflective doubling of the hardware, coupled with the supposition of an existential quest, contributes to the sense of a postmodern envoy which typifies the imaginative extremes of O’Brien’s fiction and which persistently ventures beyond mundane analysis into the domain of wild and crackpot metaphysical speculation.

Neil Murphy and Keith Hopper – guest editors and experts on both O’Brien and postmodernism (236) – suggest that *The Third Policeman* might in retrospect be considered one of the finest examples of a [pre]postmodern novel: ‘funnier than Joyce and bleaker than Beckett’ (9) but the manuscript was rejected by publishers for being too fantastic and only published posthumously in 1967. O’Brien’s first novel *At Swim-Two-Birds* (1939) while acclaimed by the writer Graham Greene ‘sold only 244 copies before Longman’s London warehouse was destroyed during the Blitz’ (10). However, his alter-ego the columnist and critic Myles na gCopaleen quips: ‘the book survived the war while Hitler did not’ (19 n6). O’Brien’s work is more popular now than in his lifetime, assisted by the good intentions of the Dalkey Archive.

Creative writers dream of finding a supportive publisher, of cultivating a clued-up readership, that responds with an open mind but critically to new and experimental work, that appreciates the humour, the irony, the pathos and the seriousness of satire, in both a literary and a cultural context. The Dalkey Scholarly Press was founded in Chicago in 1984 as an adjunct press to *The Review* and named in honour of O’Brien’s fifth and final novel *The Dalkey Archive* (1964), which was published two years before his death. Its select object was to reprint featured authors taken up in the *Review* but in time the Press branched out to cover other authors and original unpublished works with an emphasis on modernist and postmodernist literary fiction. Modeled on Grove Press and New Directions the raison d’être of the Press is given as the desire to promote cross-cultural mediation and translation in the interests of better cultural and literary understanding, and to recover and keep minority works continuously in print and accessible to scholars interested in transnational exchange. Projects aimed firstly to facilitate critical work that would not normally reach publication in the United States because of the small demand for its like;
secondly, the endeavour had the goal of breaking down the barriers of accessibility between cultures, both within the home borders and in relation to multicultural offerings from abroad. In 2006 the venture was relocated to the University of Illinois, where a centre was established with an interest in gathering all of O’Nolan’s oeuvre and critical responses under one rubric.

The editors of the Centenary Essays suggest that O’Brien’s increasing relevance to literary studies is well-argued by both established scholars and the up-and-coming generation of new critics who have expanded the discourses on the subject in recent years. On one hand these essays go beyond comparison with O’Brien’s direct contemporaries James Joyce and Samuel Beckett to situate the author in the context of other traditional Irish writers of minority literature such as Tomás Ó Criomhthain and the Irish Gothic enthusiast Sheridan Le Fanu. And on the other hand Brian Ó Conchubhair points out in his essay ‘Writing on the Margin – Gaelic Glosses or Postmodern Marginalia?’ that O’Brien’s Gaelic novel, The Poor Mouth, is not simply a naturalistic project but an exercise in minority literature that transforms native satire and parody in a configuration that richly anticipates a universal postmodern aesthetics. Other essayists in the text make comparisons between O’Brien’s work and various late-modernist and transnational authors – Dante, Alfred Jarry, Graham Greene, Nabokov and Calvino – evoking a multi-layered cognitive field with valuable pickings for both literary archivist and creative artist to feast upon. The author’s work is exposed as compulsively imaginative, generously open-ended and progressive, but uncannily prescient about Irish-ness in response to some universal conundrums of human existence.

On the whole, the Centenary Essays are a tour de force of concentrated critical investigation that presents more clues to the postmodern fall from grace than most dedicated texts on the subject. The embedded nature of the Catholic Church to the weave of the author’s writing is deemed significant. Carlos Villar Flor explores the gap between O’Brien as a postmodern writer and a Catholic writer, making a distinction between ‘the implied writer’ and ‘the implied censor’. Jennika Baines, Maciej Ruczaj and others insist that O’Brien confronts the faith, the mysteries and the revelations of religious life, not as an apostate but in the role of a shaman, seeking out the source of spiritual malaise and earthly corruption. His protagonists transgress only in specular realms, as they drift between ontological worlds and narrative levels only to uncover the infernal irony and inevitability of divine retribution. However, it is O’Brien’s alter-ego, Myles na gCopaleen, who wields the public clout, a columnist bent on the deconstruction of cultural humbug, not only in the Catholic Church but in society’s doings at large.

What is in a name? Aiden Higgens suggests in the first chapter of the Centenary Essays, ‘The Hidden Narrator’, that the artist disappears into ego-fantasies of his own creation – a classic postmodern schizoid subject, he manifests multiple personae: ‘few knew him by sight’ (29). Flann O’Brien is the pen name used by the writer Brian Nolan (O’Nolan or Ó Nualláin) for his fictional works. Nolan wrote under other disguises – Brother Barnabas, George Knowall, and more – which makes it difficult to track and gather all his works together under one moniker. Higgens suggests that he took this path for two reasons. Firstly, he wanted to protect his job with the Irish civil service. (Personal political opinions were not allowed to be expressed in public and he had an extended family of unemployed siblings to support). Secondly, Nolan used aliases to ‘write back’ to his own opinion pieces, provoking public dialogue in newspapers and magazines by mischievously planting and then deconstructing his own letters and articles. However,
Flore Couluma in ‘Tall Tales and Short Stories: Cruiskeen Lawn and the Dialogic Imagination’ argues convincingly that the author’s dominant persona, the critic and long-term columnist for the Irish Times, na gCopaleen (or naGopaleen) – who held the position for twenty-six years until his death in 1966 – provides the key to a ‘satirical genius’ and the understanding of his writing as a whole. She argues that ‘The Cruiskeen Lawn’ (the name of his column) is the minor genre which defines the dialogical core at the heart of Nolan’s literary imagination and ultimate creative method.

Val Nolan suggests in ‘Flann, Fantasy, and Science Fiction: O’Brien’s Surprising Synthesis’ that increasingly the author’s work bridges the locus of collision between cultural ignorance and modern education, between Ireland’s rich fantasy traditions sustained by nineteenth century imaginative capacities and the structural logics of twentieth century science and technology. O’Brien’s protagonists are miraculously suspended between physical existence and the hereafter, known and unknown, in that moment of transition between superstition and scientific understanding that admits the fantastic. The reader is poised to fall either way, as the fantastic is not necessarily usurped by surface rationality and rhetoric nor is logic the master of deep-seated lunacy. We recognise the existence of irrationality at large in our world. Val Nolan writes that O’Nolan fears that for the first time in history a man-made Armageddon could fulfil the dire prophesies of the scriptures. He argues that O’Brien’s dystopias were created out of a perceived dehumanisation caused by the forces of mass-industrialisation, World War and Cold War politics and the human capacity to perpetrate nuclear destruction. Nolan suggests that O’Brien’s protagonist de Selby has an oracular function in the community: the ‘role of the shaman is to cross into the other world and bring back vital information for the benefit of the tribe’ (184), the knowledge of how to survive.

No one disputes O’Brien’s misogyny. Amy Nejezchleb claims that the author’s last and unfinished novel Slattery’s Sago Saga was intended as an assault on the ‘new woman’ and American-style feminism. However, this novel contains O’Nolan’s first and last female character of any depth, a rich Scottish-American woman called Crawford who concocts a plan to rid Ireland of the potato and so save America from the bane of Irish immigration. Gloriously and inadvertently O’Brien creates an assertive female who talks back to society from outside the usual stereotypes and mores of the masculine gaze. The author knew that he needed a financial success to keep afloat and attempted to temper his satirical commentary with a marketable comic realism. He aimed to attack the corruption of American politics from the top down and issued the destitute Irish with an anti-American warning about false promises/dreams of wealth and power to be had for the taking if only they would set sail for America. Nonetheless it is the irony of the Irish-American bond which drives the parody and satire of the creative work. O’Nolan longed for the bizarre humour of Slattery’s Sago Saga to catch on and bring him American success. He worked with enthusiasm, making copious notes on the development and promotion of the work; unfortunately, he missed the boat, dying of the demon drink before his feverish planning could come to fruition. Post-mortem, however, the Sago Saga has been converted to a successful script and the black comedy played out to some acclaim.

This foray into O’Brien’s work reminds us that the figural and the fantastic exist to question the received narratives of society. O’Brien cleaves to the narrative instability and mocking awareness of postmodernism and experiments (after Bakhtin) with a dialogical imagination. Full of wicked subversive intent, he pits the vernacular or the foreign against the official languages of establishment. This collection of essays, in line with the
commissioning intent of the Dalkey Archive Press, promotes plurality in literature, self-conscious play with language/textuality and the value of doubt, rather than the reinforcement of closed identities, unity of form and the repressive strictures of cultural authority. And although O’Brien’s work is proven to be indissoluble in its ‘Irish-ness’ his oeuvre is hereby positioned as a vital cog in the universal pantheon of a transnational literary canon and of value to the quest for transcultural understanding. Flann O’Brien is represented as the spirit of an Irish free radical caught on the cusp of an ominous and overarching atomic age.

Christine Runnel
The idea that poets may find a voice in mysticism should not be, on reflection, an alien concept. Both poets and mystics strive to express that which can never be expressed totally because it must also be experienced. St Teresa of Avila alludes to divine intimacy, which is often accompanied by holy intoxication, leading her to speak folly in a thousand holy ways.

Davidson’s book, developed from his 2008 Doctoral thesis ‘Born of Fire, Possessed by Darkness: Mysticism and Australian Poetry’, seeks to show how the Western Christian mystic tradition has influenced a number of poets. The poets featured in this volume draw on the works of the Spanish mystics, St John of the Cross and St Teresa of Avila, Christian texts and spiritual writings, striving to reconcile the contemplative and the contemporary.

Mysticism ranges over a number of beliefs and philosophies. It is not confined to Christian teaching, but the author has wisely confined his study to Western Christian Mysticism, defined as ‘the direct, experimental, or unitive expression of Christ, God, or Godhead transcending regular modes of knowledge and language’ (8). Davidson distinguishes between mystical poets who are not mystics but who demonstrate mystical expression, and mystic poetry which refers to ‘the rare and fine cases of poetry written by established Christian mystics (8). Nor are all the Australian poets who are examined in depth in this volume Christians. What he does set out to demonstrate is the development of Australian mystical poetry from his earliest example, Ada Cambridge, to the work of indigenous poets. Prior to the individual chapters dealing with these writers, Davidson has written a general introduction entitled ‘Cross-currents and Precedents’, which looks at the Colonial period, Post-Federation and Postwar, this being World War II. In this overview he traces the strong influence of Anglican traditions and the English poets, such as Wordsworth, to a closer identification with Australian people and conditions, and finally to a reemergence of saints and scholars. A number of poets are mentioned and quoted, including Christopher Brennan, James McAuley and A.D. Hope. While these poets do not have individual chapters on their work their influence is acknowledged.

This book enriches our study of Australian poetry in three ways. Few Australian poetry scholars have examined their subject from a philosophical or theological theme and thus this book opens up a new avenue for discussion. It brings some poets to the forefront who had previously been considered irrelevant or second-rate. The chief example is Ada Cambridge, who Davidson claims was Australia’s first major mystical poet, despite being dismissed by her contemporaries as writing poems of ‘insipid femininity’ (55). The third strong positive in this book is the inclusion of Indigenous mystical poets.

John Shaw Neilson, who followed Ada Cambridge, was less influenced by her, not surprisingly given the lack of recognition of her worth, but he looked to Brennan, Yeats, and Hopkins. Neilson’s poetry was an early influence on Francis Webb, Judith Wright and Kevin Hart. Thus Davidson traces a succession and progression linked to his earlier divisions of colonial, post-federation and postwar. Francis Webb was known throughout his life as a devotional Catholic poet, but it is only in more recent times that he has been seen as ‘Australia’s most prodigious mystical poet’ (117). Davidson sees his work, as a search, and a journey. Davidson, who edited Webb’s Collected Poems (2011) asserts that ‘no Australian Christian mystical poet has yet matched the rigour and reach of Webb’s search’ (151).

Judith Wright was not a Christian yet her poetry incorporates the language and themes of the Western Christian mystics, and this aspect of her writing was acknowledged by others.

such as A.D. Hope, Vincent Buckley (with reservations) and Kevin Hart. Wright’s poetry abounds with references to water and light and grace, as in such poems as ‘The Pool and the Star’ or ‘The Blind Man’.

It is Hart who combined a deep study of theology and philosophy and through his study of phenomenology has ‘highlighted the convergences and divergences of mysticism, literature and Western philosophy from antiquity to postmodernity’ (187). Davidson suggests that at times the eroticism in Hart’s poetry reaches a carnal extreme; there is confusion between agape and Eros, even though so much of mystical poetry uses language and symbols that pertain to the sexual and erotic. Words and phrases that describe mystical union with the One, such as: ‘I slept with you’, ‘you scrape my heart’, ‘you enter me’, are, as Davidson writes, ‘powerful images of erotic union’ (210).

The mystical poetry of Indigenous Australians does not portray without reservation the Western Christian mysticism. Nor, given the treatment of these people, sometimes in the name of Christianity, is this surprising. The later poets treated in this section including Noonuccal, Kevin Gilbert, Maisie Cavanagh and John Muk Muk Burke, draw on a fusion of Christian teaching, their own Dreaming, and ancient philosophy. Their poetry is rooted in nature and the Spirit. Burke, in particular, straddles the traditions easily. As Donovan says, ‘Burke’s overt, explicit engagements with tropes of Western transcendence demonstrate how boldly Indigenous Christian mystical poetics of the twenty-first century may choose to draw upon European sources’ (247).

The poets are well represented by their poetry in this book, making it possible even for readers who are not deeply into the study of Australian poetry to appreciate it. Christian Mysticism and Australian Poetry is part of the Cambria Studies in Australian Literature Series. As such it makes a fine contribution to the study of Australian poetry, one that throws a new light on the work of some of our most prominent poets.

Emily Sutherland

Shifting the Ground of Canadian Literary Studies edited by Smaro Kamboureli and Robert Zacharias (Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2012)

Shifting the Ground of Canadian Literary Studies is a part of the TransCanada series of texts devoted to exploring the paradigmatic and dramatic changes that have affected Canadian literature and cultural studies in recent years. Much of the material included in the collection derives from presentations for TransCanada Two: Literature, Institutions, Citizenship at the University of Guelph in 2007, but with important amendments. Hence, this text represents a continuation of a significant groundswell in the realignment of the cultural criteria defining not just Canadian literature, but also Canadian culture and politics. By clear inference the value of such a self-reflexive examination extends well beyond the borders of Canada and provides a relationship for a broadened redefinition of literature in general as well as Canadian literature and national identity. By tapping identity the entire concept of what is literary and what may be thought of as a cultural right ‘to pass freely without let or hindrance’ for the marginalised and disadvantaged is rewoven into the literary and historical fabric of the nation. In short, there has been an awakening to the polyphony of voices that were silenced by the legacy of a tarnished national narrative which spoke almost exclusively on behalf of a white body politic.

While it is tempting to extrapolate beyond the boundaries of what is Canadian, it is important to remember that this is still a collection which is grounded in tracking Canadian identity and thus opening up new possibilities for the perception of Canadian literature. It is not a critique of global culture and does not attempt to provide that depth of theoretical footing required of a rigorous philosophical treatise, although constructing identity and not just Canadian identity surely becomes an issue which is probed in light of the Canadian perspective which inevitably must be integrated with a larger world view. All local practice must still be measured against a national narrative, and the national narrative against a world view predicated upon effective reason. But if reason is always amalgamated with the prejudice of perspective, as intimated in several of the essays, it carries with it a silent approbation for truth-seeking claims, an idea that would seem to run contrary to the very project that new perspectives would wish to redress. The idea that any tactic is a good tactic so long as it upends the previous code of British post-colonial dominance is never explicitly stated by any of the authors, but there is some sense of obduracy about such a notion. This is hardly surprising considering the legacy of the past which Janine Brody catalogues in ‘White Settlers and the Biopolitics of State Building in Canada’. Brody states her interest is to ‘destabilize contemporary national narratives’ that would try to impose an historically hierarchic image of cultural diversity in the social fabric of the nation. This interest would imply an ongoing adversarial relationship with the national narrative.

The past is almost always less than honourable in its putative claims for fairness versus actual practice, but the present must also be weighed against this same ongoing capacity for presumably enlightened change. To draw a parallel with the idea of change for change’s sake, consider an analogy with Adorno and Hockheimer’s Grand Hotel of the
Abyss, the phrase popularised by Georg Lukacs. Adorno and Hockheimer conceived of an original Hegelian sin in the means by which thought must eliminate all that is not thought, to devour the opposition in its effort to create identity. But the alternative of a ‘logic of disintegration’ seems to leave not only just the fading melody of a ‘ludic’ moment, but also the bitter aftertaste of despair (Adorno; cf. Buck-Morss). Nothing is achieved, aside from the pleasure the game provides its privileged players, or as Lukacs puts it, a considerable part of the leading German intelligentsia, including Adorno, have taken up residence in the ‘Grand Hotel Abyss’ which I described in connection with my critique of Schopenhauer as ‘a beautiful hotel, equipped with every comfort, on the edge of an abyss, of nothingness, of absurdity.’

Without labouring the point, this collection of essays pays homage to an informed rationality, and, indeed, most of the essays make a point of consciously eschewing a truculent criticism based on the privilege of superior present knowledge. They avoid the presumption of a blinkered march of progress. Jeff Derksen’s opening essay, ‘National Literature in the Shadow of Neoliberalism’ alludes to this kind of abyss when he suggests that ‘hybridity’ and ‘nomadism’ and many more tropes of poststructuralism are perilously similar to the projects of the neoliberal state where globalism is a metaphor for corporatism. The assumption would be that most writers have valid reasons then to ‘destabilize national narratives’ but do they not then become a part of the national narrativity?

The majority of the writers are sentient of this pitfall of bourgeois neoliberalism. Derksen focuses on it while in ‘The Time Has Come: Self and Community Articulations in Colour. An Issue and Awakening Thunder,’ [sic] Larissa Lai makes a point of enunciating her objectivity by stating (via allusion to Awakening Thunder) a desire to be ‘free of sexism, racism, classism and heterosexism.’ This testament may be laudable, but it is moot as to whether it is ever achievable in the rational realisation of human liberty. The interest is there, however, and the methodology is laid bare by the reinsertion of local events in the national dialogue as disruptions to historical unilinearity and as recognitions of time as a fragmented commodity. The critical issue would seem to be that this history does not succumb to bias and maintains at least a notion of what Hegel would call a Weltgeist, a sublation of previous contradictions leading towards synthesis (cf. The Phenomenology of Spirit). Yet Hegelian dialectics, however objective, fail to admit the unspoken voice. The historicity of literature as well as its communicative character should presuppose a relation of work, audience, and new work which takes the form of a dialogue as well as a process, and which can be understood in the relationship of message and receiver as well as in the relationship of question and answer, problem and solution. Shifting the Ground is about just that: the relation of old work and old voices to new work and new voices in building a collective consciousness. While controversial, it is without question a critically important anthology of texts.

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It is impossible to discuss all the essays here, but they include impressive cultural critiques by Samaro Kamboureli in his ‘Introduction,’ by Jeff Derksen in his intriguing look at ‘National Literature in the light of Neoliberalism’ (previously mentioned), by Danielle Fuller, by Janine Brody (previously mentioned), by Robert Zacharias in his evocative ‘‘Some Great Crisis’: Vimy as Originary Violence’ – a look at the trajectory of governmental control in cultural history, by Monika Kin Ganon and Yasmin Jiwani, by Larissa Lai (previously mentioned), by Kathy Mezei, by Yoko Fugimoto, by Pauline Wakeham, by Len Findley, and by Peter Kulchyski whose concluding essay examines indigenous acts of inscription as writing against the state.

Any personal penchant for a more philosophical text must be countervailed by the ardent pragmatism that dominates the collection. The extensive catalogue of travesties executed in the name of presumably enlightened national policy and the accompanying perception of literature in the past bespeak a broader definition of what is Canadian and what is Canadian literature. To allude again to Lai, ‘the time has come.’ *Shifting the Ground* is indispensable reading for current re-thinking of national identity, literature, postcolonialism, and the shaping of history.

Christopher Ward