

Book Reviews

Herbert Halpert, Edited and with an Introduction by J.D.A. Widdowson, *Folk Tales, Tall Tales, Trickster Tales and Legends of the Supernatural from the Pinelands of New Jersey: Recorded Between 1936 and 1951 and Annotated by Herbert Halpert* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 2010). Cloth. Pp. xii + 646. ISBN 978-1-57806-994-1. Unjacketed Cloth. \$US 149-95. £UK 89-95.

Most Australians would not have heard of the Pinelands of New Jersey. Located in the south of that state, the map provided with this volume identifies it as an area of less than 250 square kilometres. Those who have been interested in folktales may already know of the extensive collecting undertaken in the north-east of the USA by Herbert Halpert. Those who come new to the topic of folktales, or who wish to undertake serious work on that topic, will certainly become aware of the Pinelands and this amazing work. As the leading folklorist, Carl Lindahl, declared in his Preface, this book ‘takes its place among folklore’s indispensable classics immediately upon publication.’ (p. ii) One cannot disagree.

Herbert Halpert (1911–2000) is described as ‘indisputably the world’s leading scholar of North American English-language folktale traditions’ (p. i). He has long had wider acknowledgement, if not renown, for his *Christmas Mumming in Newfoundland* (1969), and *Folktales of Newfoundland* (2 vols, 1995) with John D. Widdowson—this latter work described by three other folklore scholars as ‘the most important folktale collection since the Grimms’. (p. ii) Despite the evident Newfoundland focus which coordinated this successful published work, for nearly seventy years Halpert had continued his work on the folktales of the Pinelands; and now, twelve years after Halpert’s death, his extensive and thoughtful work is edited and brought to the public by John Widdowson. The history of this life-long work thus raises the question of the origin of Halpert’s interest, and then secondly what sustained this interest throughout such a long and successful career. The ‘Introduction’ (with its engaging mix of Halpert and Widdowson’s voices) tells us that Halpert originally came to the topic almost inadvertently—that his aim had been to collect folksongs, but that the locals kept deflecting this aim, by preferring to share their tales with him. What might be called this ‘generosity of community’ worked to draw him into its own folk momentum. Once Halpert realized the power of these works, he confidently turned from the collection of songs to the collection of tales. As if over-whelmed by this process, his method, at least in the early days, was broad and accepting—‘I simply asked about old stories, and wrote down all those I was told’. (p. 23) In this way, the details and emphases of the community’s own pattern was able to emerge in the records, unhindered by the scholarly preconceptions of the times. It might be said that the folklore took control of the folklorist. At the very least, in this current theory-driven era, this account should be a reminder to all scholars to let the data have its own voice.

The Pinelands area, known locally as the 'Pines', was considered as comparatively barren, and so settlement came late to the area. (p. 11) As the land gradually became inhabited, so a 'Piney' typically worked a small farm, valued hard work and good workmanship, but also was an individualist who found it difficult to discard 'the old pioneer patterns of violence and aggression'. (p. 13) All of those who were evident as storytellers were male and were aged between sixty and eighty. In addition to their need to share their stories, they had a concern to get them 'right', but also a concern for the performative aspect. In addition to judicious pausing, skilled storytellers also paid attention to

bringing out the dramatic quality of the tale [by] interpretative intonation, a ready flow of speech, and the use of facial expressions and gestures. (p. 34)

In this way, there is more engagement with the stories, and the whole is more memorable.

Turning to the actual stories of this area, many of them form two main cycles: those of Jerry Munyhun; and those of Fiddler Sammy Giberson, he 'said to have gotten his music from the sky and to have faced the devil in a fiddling contest'. (p. iii) To give an indication of the scope of the tales, Sammy Giberson is the subject of 45 legends, which 'range from 11 to 423 words in length and average fewer than 120 words'. (p. iii) Throughout, the tales on all subjects are typically brief in length and simple in structure—legends and anecdotes which could be most readily recalled and retold. However this shortness of tale does not indicate a simplicity of content or meaning, for as Lindahl puts it—

The briefly told, tightly structured tales—some verging on proverbs in their power to condense a situation and make their point—are steeped in an esthetic directly opposed to, but no less artful than, the tales of the Brothers Grimm.

In addition to these aspects, the length of the overall collection (642 pp.) means that by any measure this is a substantial volume.

Another indication of the work's scope is its broad coverage of topics. The whole is structured into two major divisions:

Part I contains:

tricksters
rhyiming taunts
fools
human behaviour
heroes
tall tales
humorous tales, and
riddles.

Part II contains:

Fiddler Sammy Giberson
devils, and
Jerry Munyhun the Wizard of the Pines.

Despite the prominence of the two major cycles, and the broader attractiveness of their subject matter, by reserving these two to the second Part, the presentation avoids the possibility of their dominating the whole collection. In this way the breadth of human response and story (evident in Part I) is allowed its rightful prominence.

Just as Halpert came to the topic inadvertently, and with no pre-determined classification system to be applied, he does explain that his analysis ranged selectively across several systems. In brief, although the systems of Hartland, Aarne-Thompson, Krappe or Christiansen may have been applied, 'the New Jersey material is not always amenable to such categorization.' (p. 17) Still, a sustained and scholarly attempt is made to map these tales to the most useful of these categorisations; this is done in an appendix, 'Index of Motifs' (pp. 625-641), which forms a solid and useful section late in the work. Interestingly, the 'Pineys' classified their own tales according to 'their belief in the story's factual truth'—a four-step pattern ranging from 'Stories with supernatural elements' to 'Stories obviously untrue'. (pp. 18-19) Their own genre classifications were—

'stories about' someone, 'true' stories, 'bedtime' stories, 'witchery' stories, 'ghost' stories, , and 'Irish' stories. (p. 37)

There is much in this overall approach which would encourage other collectors in being true to their data and its community, as well as in applying a scholarly rigour which draws upon the most appropriate of previous scholarship.

Appropriately, Halpert's notes for these stories follow the principles of exhausting the local analysis, and then looking closely to the USA parallels, and then finally looking further afield to the British parallels. Any comparative lens is thus illuminating the local rather than dominating it.

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Australian scholars and readers would wonder about the Australian relevance of this material and the approaches to it. Despite our mobility and multiculturalism, the small scale of the Pinelands shows that we could look to those similarly small areas of Australia which have been socially and geographically stable. Certainly the content would differ greatly. Essential for any study of Australian folklife would be the motif of the trickster, often presented in the larrikin role, but more broadly evidenced in the dry humour of much speech. However, Australian stories would be less celebratory of the trickster, than the Piney tricksters (who are dealing more with individual hardship). Australian trickster-tales are more often linked to the demands of hard work (such as in Henry Lawson's story 'The Ironbark Chip'), or to dealing with unfeeling power or authority (as in Depression-era tales), or the communal pub-tales shown in David Ireland's *The Glass Canoe* (1976). Beyond such Australian parallels, the next step for most analysis of Australian tales would be for the British parallels. Halpert's approach shows a direction for Australian work which could stand international comparison, and become part of the cross-culture conversation.

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This posthumous completion of Halpert's work shows that the richness of a small stable community's stories can be enough to sustain the interest of more than one lifetime, and can bring much insight to others. Halpert's groundbreaking achievement shows the way for such surveys elsewhere. In both its preservation of material and in its presentation, it is a sustained and profound work.

Robert James Smith

Tradition Today. No 1, April 2011. Sheffield: The Centre for English Traditional Heritage. 71 pp.

This new e-journal in English for folklorists comes from Sheffield, and is to be seen as a new venture for Emeritus Professor John D.A.W. Widdowson, long time head of the Centre for English Tradition and Language within the University of Sheffield. [Another article in this volume of *Australian Folklore* discusses this Centre's uneven history and sad and severe curtailment in recent years.]

In addition to the succinct editorial, there are a range of articles, namely:

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| Gillian Bennett | Phantom Hitchhikers and Bad Deaths |
| Ruairidh Greig | Wassailing in South Yorkshire |
| Peter Robson | Thomas Hardy's Ghosts |
| John Ryan | Traditions in Exile: Canada, Australia, Their Own Countries' Folklore Disciplines |
| Gordon Brotherston | Winefride's Scar and Merlin's Horse in the Landscape of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight |
| J.D.A. Widdowson | Chasing Shadows: Retrieving the Text and Context of the Mummers' Play from the Change Islands, Newfoundland |

Clearly we are dealing here with a fine new contribution to the discipline and the folklore field, with a nice mix of the ingredients that one would expect from the unduly modest leader of regional folkloric work in England in the last forty years and more.

We applaud the initiative and the dignity of a new journal which bids fair to maintain the standards so long associated with its editor, his links with Newfoundland, and his many links with the English-speaking countries where his pupils and friends have done so much for the recording of the true folk voice of the regions of the British Isles, and of England especially.

JSR

The Locals. Identity, Place and Belonging in Australia and Beyond. By Rob Garbutt. Oxford, Bern, Berlin, New York, etc.: Peter Lang, 2011. [Being volume 24 in the *Cultural Identity Series*, and this text edited for it by Professor Helen Chambers.] Soft covers. Pp. xi, 250,+ iv. And with one location figure / map. ISSN 1661-3252. ISBN 978-3-0343-0154-19 (alkaline paper). R.R.P. Euro €38.89 . Also avail. as .pdf download, at same price.

This trim and highly legible volume is a related and sharpened focus book by a lecturer, recently awarded his Ph.D., in social science from the Southern Cross University, a tertiary but relatively youthful institution located at Lismore in the north east corner of the Australian state of New South Wales. This climatically and socially relaxed general area constitutes a peculiarly significant aspect of the structure and content of this theoretical and practical study—even as it also has a significant population of Australian Aborigines, as well as being recognised now to be functioning as both a holiday and an alternative lifestyle area for New South Wales, and for Australia generally.

In a sense, and this is more true than may usually be claimed, the text is a desperately honest life work /life exploration from its author, if we allow—as we should—that it is formally /spatially based in the actual region of his modest parents' farm, and so, and more generally, of his most significant nurture and identity formation. Yet, for those who have attempted such a returning task, it is clearly a reflective autobiography with so many appraisals of the writer's life over twenty years and more.

Further, its writing was clearly taken on as a morally necessary task, when, after years away, he had come back home to live and teach, and, almost immediately investigate, in scholarly and desperately honest fashion, the notion/ reality of what was his own 'home'. In this case, the investigation was one of what had been deemed to be his own true milieu, and then—perhaps unexpectedly—to be a project moving to the more profound question, and far beyond the body of lore in which he felt himself to exist, to one as to where one /he himself may meaningfully belong. This aspect of the whole makes the text even more riveting on a close re-reading, since it may be deemed as a form of confessional the more powerful in that what emerges is not at all either the task or the finding that had been anticipated.

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In this case, the 'place' issue is much more confused—in the more moral sense—by reason of the location being a small city where the true natives were the Aboriginal people, and yet one where they had long been treated as though they were socially—and literally—invisible. Further, the whole research and questing matter took on an even greater ambivalence when the writer, without much prior introspection into such matters, had—somewhat casually but in a 'feel good' fashion—signed a copy of the local Aboriginal *Sorry Book* (pp.16 ff.), a volume for personal signatures of those concerned with /indicating personal responsibility for the now almost universal and shocking plight of the Aboriginal race.

This same action would then compel personal identification and a new and guilty sense of responsibility, and it would acknowledge for those individuals

the prior /lawful occupation of the same region /the Australian continent by extension—by the Aboriginal people. For the European settlers had long pretended the Indigenous not to be there /never to have occupied the land *ab initio*.

From an increase in this very guilt-ridden (and belated) personal awareness, the writer had then embarked on a more significant research project—one concerned with his own mortality and spatial /ethical responsibilities, and these now realised to have so many confusing layers and consequences. This whole issue had already been mulled over by the writer (Rob Garbutt) in this present journal in his earlier piece, ‘The Locals: A critical Survey of the Idea in Recent Australian Writing’ (*Australian Folklore*, 21, pp. 172-192). That article’s segments, too, were concerned with the moral/eschatological aspects—of his own family’s moral assumptions; of his ever increasing respect for his own parents and for their harsh and honest lives as poor farmers, yet somehow providing enabling opportunity for him; of the general settler guilt; and of awareness of the divisive nature of his own original and nurturing community, now that he had come back to it after further education and work experience in the state’s capital, Sydney.

And, as the cataloguing in progress entries tell us (p. iv), the book is also concerned with: the national characteristics of Australia, and with the related ‘group identity’; respect for its major ethnic groups; and, perforce, for the many social aspects /consequences of emigration and of immigration. Further, it has a most comprehensive and world-ranging (i.e. comparative) bibliography—and one which might well have been theme-sectioned, the better to assist the reader.

Yet this last purpose is contributed most lucidly in the segmented ‘Introduction’, it being divided into: Object and Subject; and Method—one inextricably bound up with the process of writing out the ever more clearly understood experience, for ‘the meditation is aimed at forming the subject’ (p. 3). Then there follows: argument and structure; on being a local; the notions of ‘territory’ and the efforts needed in getting to know a local; [one’s] local presence and absence; and the matter of moving into and beyond the local. For, of course, when one is at the face of ‘locality’, when the native returns, there are few alternatives for escape/self-deluding. All of this is reflective, honest and completely convincing as a record of his personal findings.

For the core of this musing—as of the book as a whole—is concerned with one’s ‘Return’, or with the writer’s coming back to an intertwining of landscape, history, home, identity and personal experience, these ingredients already fused /bound ‘into an unravellable whole’ (p. 15). Interestingly, he has also ‘come home’ to learn afresh of the whole settlement pattern of the region [supported by a map], especially from the days of the cedar getters. And he has made a close study of the related white settler research work on the region over the last 40-50 years, as with his reference to Louise T. Daley, or to B. Stubbs and to the latter’s significant work on the fine original grasses of the region.

All of this is trenchantly summarised in the contrasting records, a silent condemnation—

Today the clearing of the underbrush, vines, dead wood, and timber of the Big Scrub has become the stuff of local history and legend. The clearing of the Bunjalung people from that same land is the stuff of silence. (p. 22)

And he continues with reflections on this ‘clearing’ as ‘an appropriate index of the colonial mindset, following this with a linking his search to the notions of Martin Heidegger (pp. 24, ff.) as to the moral /metaphysical space that we all occupy in the world. This local one now being grappled with has been created by a complex of largely imported mindsets, the which, he deems to include /have included:

land and landscapes; the sounds of the clearing; skin colour; axes,saws, ceremonies, governments, property lore; weather; distance; markets and empires; language and newspapers; inhabitants of many origins; their ways; all together. (p. 25)

This section then treats the created conflict between the newcomers’ clearings and the natural thickets—for ‘this local place is potentially transforming, a place which no longer can be experienced as the same.’ (p. 27) ‘Displaced’ and ‘uprooted’ are the terms that he calls up to describe his /our now ever more confused state of mind. But this section is one other progressing narrative and his own place’s story, all of which he sees to be a mix of the accepted narrative, situation, and the possibility of other versions of what happened /might well have taken place, in short, of ‘alternative paths’ (p. 27) to the present generally, and to himself as a sentient and responsible member of the human race as, and all too late, it tries to identify its behaviour in his own place.

And so he turns to the thought of the contemporary anthropologist, Alasdair MacIntyre, citing the latter’s helpful summation,

man is in his actions and practice... essentially a story-telling animal. He is not essentially, but becomes through his history, a teller of stories that aspire to the truth. But the key question is... ‘What am I to do, if I can answer the prior question: ‘Of what story or stories do I find myself a part’ ? (*ibid.*)

The whole deduction /conclusion is one close to the Australian anthropologist, W.E.H. Stanner’s 1968 theme of the tragedy of ‘the great Australian silence’, and yet its proper concomitant of an individual dwelling here being care for one’s place, that as a characteristic of all inhabitants of the continent. And the same is true of Chapter 2, with its stress on one’s specific place as a determinant of so much human action, of inherent conservatism, of the homely, and the comfort of understood identity, as well as the sharpest awareness of translocal connections that must disturb that comfort zone.

Then he turns—and very logically—to the sense of the word ‘local’ as it developed in the English language, from those persons ‘with a common (and provincial) understanding of the world’ (p. 37), and so to the [developing awareness of the disastrous] rise of industrialism and of urbanisation (*ibid.*). From this, the next step is to describe the return, almost desperately, to the necessary and so truly meaningful scale of things for man, one now cited much as it has recently been phrased by the comparativist, Louise Appleton:

By 'local' I mean a collective expression of places that connote territory, people and emotional ties. The local scale has close associations with 'community' referring to 'an aggregate of people who share a common interest in a particular locality'. (p. 43)

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It is at this stage that the reader comes to the conclusion that the writer has, in effect, developed for himself many of the thought processes that relate to the mid twentieth century discipline styled 'community development', a sequel to the thought of both Marx and Weber, and, more specifically, to the that of E.P. Thompson (1924-1993), in exploring objective class systems and people's subjective experience of those structures. For Garbutt, like Thompson, is attempting to rescue human agency and so endorse the development of the subjective community /individual, deeming this as possible once the level of consciousness has been raised sufficiently.

Thus the 'western' escape from public life that came in the later 1970s and in subsequent decades would seem to be challenged by Garbutt, who may well be deemed one appealing for more public action /volunteerism in a number of spheres, and, linked to this, some form of return to cohesive, dynamic communities, and so to community arts. In the end, however, his prime concern is with being in [one's true] place, 'the phenomenology of local place' (p. 52), with its dynamism and its contribution to what the individual really is, a matter of so much greater significance than the transition from rural community to industrial nation. (p. 71)

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Garbutt's book, for all its personal and localised focus, is to be understood as a chastening study of the pretensions adopted by so many 'westerners' since the middle of the twentieth century as they seek to establish themselves in positions that they /their circle would deem to be 'local'. It also mentions in further illustration the recent instance of the arrogance of the 'local beach users' in the matter of the Sydney confrontation, the Cronulla race riot of December 2005 (p. 199), citing this as yet another instance of the general theme—[the] cultural autochthony that

collapses settler culture and nature into a complex of material and imaginary relations between people, peoples, and land in Australia...with practices and social orders transported from England and located within the Australian context. (p. 199)

Accordingly he has again focussed for us the alarming consequence of those who—in most cases—will determine 'who belongs to and who has rights to speak and act for the land'. (p. 201)

His retort to all of this inherited mindset is a recovery as far as is possible of the Aboriginal concept of the care for country, one embracing

'A multidimensional matrix of 'people, animals, plants, Dreamings, underground, earth, soils, minerals and waters, surface water and air' (this is quoted on p. 214).

And so the notion of ‘local’ has broadened out to embrace so many cultural dimensions of the life we have now, as opposed to a muddled hope for the *life to be lived* by the individual. In short, this a fine example of the quiet man’s search for the significance of what he is doing, and this in the place where he has come to do his best life-thinking. It is Jung applied in a real situation by a man who has chosen to do his analysis of where he is, and what baggage he has got around him.

JSR

Australians in Britain: The Twentieth Century Experience, ed. by Carl Bridge, Robert Crawford and David Dunstan (Clayton, Vic.: Monash University ePress, 2009). 256 pp.; full text readable online < <http://books.publishing.monash.edu/apps/bookworm/view/Australians+in+Britain%3A+The+Twentieth-Century+Experience/137/xhtml/chapter07.html>> ISBN 9780980464863 (pbk), 9780980464870 (online). RRP A\$34.95 (pbk).

This is either a fascinating—or a deeply frustrating collection for the travelled /‘exiled’ reader—being a set of some 16 [separately paginated] essays. Its impetus and source come alike from the Australian Menzies Centre, in London, one based at ‘the heart of things’—or is it a return to the Colonial Office and other modes of population for the Australian continent? But this last is a digression.

Of course, the collection comes from the Australian [return] cultural bridgehead at Kings College, University of London. And the endpapers tell us, very helpfully, that this ebook belongs in a Monash University sequence—one already to be seen to be:

- looking at ‘Australians in Italy’;
- considering perspectives on the ever more significant genre of cartooning;
- treating of historical settlement systems;
- discovering/ writing the obituary for our nation’s rural ideals;
- treating of the 21st century’s possible learning discourses;
- looking at transport and social disadvantage in Australian communities;
- or the matter of secular art .../ but also of its ‘sacramental’ roots.

Thus the whole series—or what is so far available—is clearly intended to book-end a period and so to be a *fin de siècle* type of survey and sweep of its changing mental climates, perhaps, as in similar and climacteric British publication efforts—like

- the first publications in the Everyman series in the Edwardian period;
- or the shatteringly disturbing dozen or so first Penguins as released by Allen Lane which so challenged
- the orthodoxies in the post-Depression period in England.

And so one assumes that the effect of the whole is /is intended /realized to be an exploration of the ‘home relations’ over a period in which Australia lost its previous identity, changed beyond recognition, sought to hold onto the

formative concepts which it had so long believed in—all of them so much in danger of being swept into memory by globalism.

In a strange way it is appropriate that this response is being written just prior to the ending of the acrimonious decisions to resolve the ‘Hung Parliament’ of August/September 2010, a situation which is likely to be seen later /quite soon as a collision between an old hierarchical and shallow managerial system, somehow ‘traditional’, and a far more insightful plan to enfranchise all Australians equally.

Intriguingly it is by such a collection of the retrospective recollections of so many persons as to their first hand experiences with the Motherland that we are the better able to ponder on the progress of Australian understanding of the post-colonial, the global, and the enormous changes to social identity that our overcrowded urbanized society has to face now, rather than in the coming decades.

For the present reviewer—someone who, with another sort of ‘colonial’ background, had lived in southern England for long periods in the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s, and 1990s—this collection serves as a reminder of many significant milestone events and situations—

- the austerity, general social humility and kindness of the first of these periods, that of painful rebuilding after war;
- the loss of public trust in the national parliament and the unexpected but steady English turning to Europe in the second, and so away from all parts of the Empire, despite the West Indian entries in the 1950s and the 1960s;
- the loss of national nerve and the insidious Thatcher pragmatism in the third; and
- the strangely dubious and immoral and cynical valuelessness of the fourth.

Accordingly the most perceptive and probing essays may be deemed to be—

- No. 9: ‘Melbournians in Oxford in the 1920s’, by Jim Davidson;
- No. 14: ‘Tourists, expats and invisible immigrants: Being Australian in England in the 1960s and 1970s’, by Graeme Davison, and
- No. 16: ‘Aussies, Kiwis, and Saffas in contemporary London’, by Robert Crawford.

And, it may be asserted, the collection also contains—if only in embryo/ a hint here and there—a myriad of ‘identity’ issues, these not so easily/ quickly discerned, since the bibliography lists are references all largely concerned with/ clustered at the end of the separate essays.

However, as the back cover asserts correctly,

knowledge, particularly quantitative, of Australian immigration to Britain is very sketchy... The phenomenon ..[still] ... little explored.

And so there was a real need for this collection, despite its being clearly ‘a work in progress’.

Yet the book as presented has the sort of primary evidence that all would seek to use—personal papers, personal reflections and interview-collected details, all serving to now ‘offer an important window on how Australians have related to the British world’, both historically and especially the Australian

middle-aged echelons as to ‘the dynamic nature of the contemporary relationship’.

Clearly the collection will appeal to scholars of demography, of cultural studies and to those contemplating the search for one’s (erstwhile) mindsets from the last century. For the volume seems—at least to this reader—to eschew high culture tourism and to focus on the living experiences of those seeking some understanding of their relatives at home/ themselves, and on the lessons to be drawn from spending time in southern England since c.1975.

Another aspect of the whole, loosely to be called ‘tourism’ /‘the touristic experience’ seems to be concerned with the patterns—personal and social—driving individual journeys back and forth from the southern continent. Here there are various passages—in fact, to be found in several of the essays—concerned with

- the location/ circumstances of ‘Home’ relatives;
- treating of the strange awkwardness of the English to cousins who ‘turn up’; and
- the growing embarrassment of the English people at its own disavowal of responsibility for their behaviour towards the former dominions, in particular.

These both recur and are peculiarly memorable for those who have experienced all of this. This whole complex is well caught in the tale of Helen (pp. 14-8,ff.), she a serious school teacher from Melbourne, who would:

- duly travel to London;
- acquire a suitable boyfriend in England;
- try to cope with her parents’ ‘shocked disbelief’ at this crisis (14.9);
- marry, come to Melbourne to enable the husband to be met;
- return to England in 1974 to ‘find a gloomier country than they had left’(14.9),
- stay there, resettle in Australia, and then return to England, and pretend that there were no pulls back to Victoria and the nurture there.

In his conclusion to this most memorable essay, one with wondrous archival materials very shrewdly analysed, Graeme Davison reflects that in 1930, it was not impossible for Australians ‘to be in love with two soils’, but that

as Britain entered the European Community and a multi-cultural Australia sought new friends in the United States and Asia, this sentimental bond was gradually weakening. (14.11)

Another crucial—and mind-focussing—jigsaw piece is the eighth essay, ‘The Crumbs are Better than a Feast Elsewhere: Australian Journalists on Fleet Street’ by Bridget Griffen-Foley. The period of them being magnetized thither was the Depression and the Thirties, one which had seen a drop in the cable rates—a seismic shift nearly equivalent to the rise of the computer and the internet. Thus the whole period, 1900-1939, had allowed for an enormous expansion of daily communication, thus ‘making it possible for Australians to participate in British public life on a day-to-day basis’ (08.1). Interestingly the

emphasis here is mainly on Australians who worked for the London press, rather than on the London bureaux of Australian newspapers. And there is as yet to be considered /linked with this the phenomenon of the saturation of Australian—and New Zealand—newspapers with stories about the Royal Family, this being a considerable driver for /explanation of the triumphal tours of Queen Elizabeth II in both of these countries in the 1950s.

For the present reviewer, the second most significant essay is that by Jim Davidson, “‘Home’ Becomes Away: Melbournians in Oxford in the 1920s”, the writing a spin off from his then almost completed biography of W.K. Hancock. Although it is the most high-powered essay—as it seeks to make a subtle differentiation on 1920s Oxford—perhaps its real value is to capture the loneliness of the solitary young Australian meeting Jewish, Marxist and other intellectuals, almost always hugely self-opinionated young men. The details here teased out are harder to follow, and more true to the experiences of so-placed individuals than the trends, these last so much more matters of general reportage as found widely elsewhere in the book.

For me, the key omission would seem to be an essay of quiet reflection from an Australian /Australasian who stayed in both Oxbridge and in the intellectual life there for several decades. Thus I would have liked to have heard from a Bruce Mitchell (ob. 2010), an Ian Donaldson, with his long exposure to both Oxford and Cambridge, [as well as Melbourne University and the Australian National University], or even some less personal recollections from R.J. Hawke, or a long-time Agent-General for New South Wales, watching from his vantage point in the Strand.

As I read and re-read the book, largely it seemed to be reportage, massive in its documentation, but short on analysis and coherence—for all the value of the first chapter, ‘More than just Barry, Clive and Germaine’. Of course, as reportage it is invaluable, even as it may well become a crucial text in a field to be styled ‘Mother Country and her Errant Grandchildren’, or even the obvious and nicely ambiguous title borrowed from the world of commercial television—‘Home and Away’.

JSR