

Book Reviews

Elizabeth Taylor, *Haunted Halls: Ghostlore of American Campuses* (Jackson, Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 2007). Paper and cloth. P. ix + 241. ISBN 978-1-57806-994-1. Unjacketed Cloth. \$US 50-00. ISBN 978-1-57806-995-8. Paper. \$US 20-00.

This somewhat unexpected volume, one by an associate professor of English at Bingham University, may indeed be said to be ‘the first in-depth study of Ghost Stories from American universities’. The volume treats an important and highly topical issue, namely how young adults (17–21) react to spatial and social change/ loss of safety at a peculiarly significant time in their lives, especially when they are exposed to institutional places old buildings, ones with disturbing/ traumatic human histories, suicides there and stories of excitement, mystery and danger. As well, and, despite new friends at hand, they are without their hitherto comforting support systems, and so, perforce, the more easily respond to the vibrations that lingering in those locations.

What gives the study such intriguing insights is that writer and her informants—and these come from a score of named Universities—are all in the ‘system’, the former with years of responsible ‘residential assistant’ experience, and as having already published several ‘single-motif’ special pieces in this field. These focused on: sensory evidence; ghostly warnings; troubling encounters; desperate lovers, spectral Indians, etc. This material, now thoroughly integrated, is nicely rounded out with a meticulous ‘Index of Tale Types and Motifs’, the bulk falling between the standard E 230 and E 765 categories... and, interestingly, several of these have not been found by me in the better known (Australian) ghost lore collections.

The writer’s study covers a period of more than forty years, from the mid-1960s to 2006, and so it moves into the realms of electronic messages, her treatment however combining the social, the psychological and the cultural. As well it records very faithfully so many students’ explanations as to the significance of these/ such spectral phenomena.

Another feature of what is clearly a painstakingly assembled range of tales is the way in which a fine and excellently integrated bibliography assists the curious/ other folklorists/ general readers to navigate themselves very easily around this diverse subject, and discern various types of patterns, not all what might have been expected.

Clearly much of the thought is pivoted around two key polarities—those of (ego) identity and of its writing down; and ‘writing the nation’/ interpreting particular aspects of the national story, as with the ‘ghosts of Gettysburg’. Similarly underscored is the resistance to what Walter Ong in 1982 would style ‘the technologising of the World’. As in his *Orality and Literacy*. Equally assuring to the reader is the writer’s crucial use of Vladimir Propp’s *Morphology of the Folktale* (1968). However, there is much acknowledgement

of the fear that is rampant for young post-moderns as discussed by Barrett Seaman in his *Binge: What your College Student Won't Tell You: Campus life in an Age of Disconnection and Excess* (John Wiley, 2005).

Perhaps the next clue to the larger blocks of the text is given by the following chapter headings:

- Two: Sensory Evidence;
- Three: Ghostly Warnings;
- Four: Troubling Encounters
- Five: Desperate Lovers and
- Seven: Spectral Indians.

Another pointer to the shaping of the book is that her earlier article, 'Ghosts in Mirrors: Reflections of the Self', published in the *Journal of American Folklore* in 2005, affords much of the material in the present chapter four, 'Troubling Encounters' (pp. 94-114).

Similarly there is much reference to horror movies and the delight in students making these as a form of recreation. Thus, as the text tells us, 'such filmed enactments of legend quests, 'increase students' expectations' (p. 204), presumably of students encountering/ responding to such situations. Equally significant is the student 'obsession' with (historical) injustices, especially in 'the nineteen-year old student making the first adjustments to living away from home' (p. 181).

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Very clearly, the writer is one of a dying breed worldwide—the academic who is both very close to her students, who both trust her and share their fears with her. Pleasingly there is a freedom from excessive psychologising on or working too hard on the sociology of the groups.

In short, the emphasis remains firmly on place, story and person—yet all of these stories remain depressingly symptomatic of the era and of the urban place.

Clearly the removal from family is something that young women seem to parade, and emote through, and so the total impact of this book is a very honest psychological study of the American College life, especially for the (lower) middle classes. To be honest, I find the style of the life depressing, and wonder—again—whether Americans do not go to College when far too young.

However, the whole is a scholarly work, reflective and industrious, but the responses to old buildings, new places, and the like seem to be too diffuse, and lacking in some degree of depth. As the accompanying note suggests, there is 'close attention to students' own explanations of the significance of spectral phenomena'. The bibliographies, footnotes, and motif lists are invaluable, bringing the text back from the morbid edge of psychology, and offering fine insights as to the writer's thoughts, and unstated comparisons and the like.

Finally, the volume is not so far from the larger thematic concerns of the crippling effect of the occult and of the supernatural, with their beauty,

enchantment—and horror. For it also deals with the night sky of our minds, the other side of our adults' mental 'daylight' of reason and hard fact. In reality, it is powerfully shaped by many of the social, psychological and cultural elements that can/ will console, guide, but also threaten and warn.

J.S. Ryan

Patricia A. Turner (1955-), *Stories and Studies of African American Quilters*, With a Foreword by Kyra E. Hicks (Arlington, VA: The University Press of Mississippi, 2009). Pp. 240. Includes bibliographical references and index. ISBN 13:978-1-60473-6 (cloth alkaline paper). ISBN 10: 16047831311.

When I began to read this book I thought, oh dear, another academic writing about quilting, and one who had not made even a single quilt. Turner was going to analyse the quilts that she saw, and that it was going to be a tale of Black American versus White American. How wrong I was to jump to that conclusion. I was made aware very quickly that this lady's intention was not to take the reader into a war zone—although there are shades of that—but it was, in fact, the stories of the quilters who happened to be African-American, eight women and one man. For all, quilting was the subject that they had chosen, and they needed to express in this mode both their passion, and the artistic drive which took them on their journey. Further, it is clear that the quilt/ its generation and ultimate fate is a form of symbol/ objective correlative for each of their lives.

As the author writes,

Although there may be exceptions to this rule, in my experience, most everyday quilters are uninterested in the debates that their work generates. Many of the quilters I have interviewed are unaware that anyone has ever hung a black quilt on a museum wall or that books have been written about these works.

They are not particularly interested in whether or not a uniquely African aesthetic influences the look of their quilts. If they like to talk about their quilts, they will do so to just about anyone, regardless of race or gender. To most quilters, the process of planning, making and parting with a quilt stems from creative and generous impulses. (p. 7)

To me, as a long time quilter, I feel that this is what drives quilters all over the world. And so, from that moment on, I was involved in the lives and stories told by nine different people. Eight women and one man gave an amazing insight into the art of making beautiful and practical treasures for their homes, their friends, and their families. And the book is not only about quilt-making, either, but how friendships are woven, families are brought together, and comfort given when it is needed.

The conversations—taking place at each interview—are recorded honestly, and faithfully written, as they were said, making the characters into real people who lived through good times, bad times, and times of fighting for recognition or gaining an education, which, for African-Americans, was a process just beginning when some of the interviewees were young. The love of quilt-making was usually/ always introduced and encouraged by a family member. The makers themselves—wise and reflective folks—range from a teenager to an octogenarian, and they represent an array of education and income levels, as well as their living right across the United States, with one even in Alaska. For some, like the author, the initial attraction to the craft/ art was the aura of research. For others it was the beauty and the intricacy of the patterns which had attracted them in the beginning. For some it was a way of earning money to help support the children's education. For others it was funding for more fabric or money to help keep the funds coming in for their church. In any case, the making of quilts had a practical application. And it was also capable of exploitation.

There is no doubt that patchwork and quilting are meant to be social activities—indeed, anyone who quilts usually does so through a group. There have been many books written about these activities, but in this work, it's the people, rather than the quilts, that take the centre stage. I loved reading it, although I found it a bit disconcerting when I was reluctantly drawn into leaving one story and getting involved in another. Another moment of pause in one's reading must be the issue presented here, that the quilters of Gee's Bend have been exploited by unscrupulous dealers in the art world, as well as by curators—a back-handed compliment on their art and its aura and muted appeal even to those of 'high taste'.

The subject of quilting and patching seems to generate a feeling of sentimentality, and that the craft is a form of identity, an index of the degree of control the individual has had over her/ his life, and a personal legacy. And—without doubt—many of the books currently available in this field aren't teaching publications, but they contain impassioned stories of real people, of their craft, their struggles and their triumphs. So it is with this book. Those of us who design and make quilts for our families and others to use need a book like Turner's to teach/ remind us that we should always regard ourselves as artists—at least in our purpose if not always in our achievement.

Patricia Turner is a master folklorist, having several books to her credit, and this is of like quality. It is written with a lively wit, and it moves on smoothly from one interview to the next. For anyone who is interested in quiet people/ the folk and their lives, this will certainly hold their interest. For those who know something of the craft of patchwork and quilting, the terms and names of the blocks will be familiar. They will also identify with the pride and love for the finished product ready for exhibition—that will be experienced by the maker.

Some of them will be kept for ever, some will be parted with, but none of them are forgotten, for they are a product of a time in the maker's life, and her/ his image for succeeding generations.

G. Cady

William D. Elder, *Playing in Time: A History of the Kerang Band: Celebrating 125 years of Music, 1884-2009* (Kerang and District Band, Inc., 2009). Pp.3 + iii, 102, illustrated with 23 photographs, mainly in full colour. [This book also contains various lists, especially of band members at significant dates. No price was supplied.]

The whole compilation offers a series of windows into a small and always dynamic country town. At the most terse summary, this book is to be summarised as a highly intelligent and readable account of this regional band over a period of some 125 years. Office-bearers, wars, and other aspects of a small Victorian country town are brought into a clear light in a volume that covers the period from the stresses of the gold rushes—they happening quite close by—through the years of relative isolation, and then to a gritty determination to continue and so to become a coherent and self-supporting town- one which has always been associated with the performance of music.

It seems that the best way to comment on the way that community, music, and personal identity have come together there is best represented by the opening to the last chapter, 9, it entitled: ‘What now? The Future of the Kerang Band’:

The Kerang Band has been going strong for 125 years and has reflected the prosperity and community spirit of the two and of the district. In no small way has the band also contributed to that same community spirit. Players, supporters, office-bearers and bandmasters have come from all walks of life- for short and long periods of time. The effort they put into their various tasks is directly responsible for their continuing existence.

[then continuing with direct quotation]

My analysis of the future is optimistic because I am confident that Kerang will continue to provide the right people at the right time, to promote music and to teach our young people the value of playing music together. It does require dedication, hard work and special skills, but most of all it needs desire- a passion for music that transcends all the pressures of the modern world. Music is a life-long venture... . Music does not discriminate and we are proud of the fact that we have provided a musical and social outlet for people with disabilities.... . (p. 89).

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Clearly this could be a text on community development, or on village society, or on group dynamics. But, arguably, it also manages to capture the peculiar cohesiveness of the Victorian country town. And it is a text peculiarly timely, as Australia makes efforts to bond again with the bush. In this handbook there are many more issues and themes of significance for the 21st century than the compiler and writer may have dreamed of.

J.S. Ryan

J.S. Ryan, Arnold Goode, Robert Haworth and Peter O'Donohue, *Golden Words and A Golden Landscape: Essays on Uralla Gold Mining History and a Glossary of the Miners' Language in Australia from the 1850s to 1905*. A volume in honour of Arnold Goode, local historian (Armidale, NSW: Arts New England, c/- School of Arts, University of New England, and the Uralla Shire Council, Uralla, NSW, 2010). With a 'Foreword' by Alan T. Atkinson and a 'Preface' by Ronald Filmer, Mayor of Uralla Shire. 181 pages, including Indices of Personal Names and of General Topics/Themes.

This sterling—or rather 'sovereign' period—book has three related parts. It is, firstly, a notable contribution to the history of gold mining at Rocky River near Uralla from 1851, secondly, an admirably useful dictionary of words which gold miners used in eastern Australia in the nineteenth century, with examples of their use taken from seven works by Rolf Boldrewood (the pseudonym of Thomas Browne) and, thirdly, a succinct commentary on recent research and speculation about the bushranger Frederick Wordsworth Ward, alias Captain Thunderbolt.

Uralla is on the New England Tableland, 465km north of Sydney and 22km south of Armidale. Its present population is about 2,300. Rocky River, a few kilometers west of Uralla, is now a scattered settlement of abandoned mines. A brief time-line of the Rocky River gold rush will help.

- 1851 In September W.F. Buchanan and J. Lucas found alluvial gold at Rocky River. Armidale's population was 556.
- 1852 The Windeyer brothers found five ounces of gold in less than a week and so won the prize being offered by the *Maitland Mercury* at the place now known as Maitland Point at Rocky River. By the end of 1852 about 150 prospectors had found about 500 ounces of alluvial gold.
In December Robert C Massie, the Commissioner for Crown Lands, issued 40 licenses to prospectors.
- 1853 In January Massie issued 94 licenses, in February 221, and in March 183. The rush had begun.
Samuel McCrossin, who was the first to come to what became Uralla, in 1839, with his seven children—all from Ireland—had an inn at Rocky River.
- 1854 Commissioner Massie counted in his census of Rocky River between the 3rd and 5th of June, a population of 350 made up of 193 males, 58 females and 99 children, living in 86 tents. By the end of the year there were about 500 there and they had won 2,000 ounces.
- 1855 Uralla attained town status.
- 1856 In February, Thomas Jones found gold which led to a deep lead shaft being sunk into what is now called Mt. Jones, and by 18

- March 200 men on Mt. Jones had won about 200 ounces.
 Armidale's population had increased substantially to 857. By the end of 1856 Rocky River's population peaked at about 5,000 and they had won 40,000 ounces for the year. There were three pubs, six stores, five butchers, four blacksmiths, two bakers and many Chinese prospectors.
- 1857 A race providing water for sluicing was built from Barley Fields Lagoon. The total gold won for the year was 30,000 ounces.
- 1858 Uralla had three hotels, a post office, a school and a flour mill built by Samuel McCrossin. This mill is now a popular and well managed McCrossins Mill Museum of local history.
- 1861 Dangar's Lagoon was formed and a race from it built by H. Roman to service the Rocky River diggings.
- 1864 9,940 ounces of gold were won.
- 1865 Rocky River's population was about 500 Europeans and 350 Chinese.
- 1875 1,178 ounces of gold were won.

John Ryan's 'List of Boldrewood's phrases/cultural contexts concerned with gold, gold mining and their societies' is 94 pages long. It is redolent of both the social and practical aspects of the hectic scramble for the bright yellow and highly sought after 'noble element'. Robert Haworth and Arnold Goode explain in their essay 'Gold and its Landscapes, Uralla in the 'Roaring Days'', that

gold owes its age-old allure to the fact that it is the metal thought least likely to tarnish...and which seemed to decay least. While gold has certain practical uses, they are far outweighed by its legendary value. From at least the time of King Midas it has had a far greater exchange value than its use value' (p. 119).

They also observed that 'all the gold ever mined would form a cube measuring only 19 metres on each side. Over half of this has been mined in the last one hundred and sixty years.'

Peter O'Donoghue states in his essay, 'Mining the Rocky River: Some Aspects of the On-going Research on the 19th Century Mining Hydrology and the Chinese Presence on the Rocky River Gold Field', that 'the figures place the Rocky River as a significant contributor to the overall gold production in NSW during the 1850s—22% in 1856 and 17% in 1857' (p. 140).

John Ryan's word list is fascinating and includes:

- *barney*, an argument, brawl.
- *duffer*, meaning a mine shaft that proves totally unproductive despite some 'colours'.
- *old goldfield's joke, a*, the which was a famous prank on visiting ladies, especially the young and pretty. 'She smiled afresh at the old goldfields joke, wherein the courteous manager made a present to her of a bag

- containing a hundred-weight and a half of the root of all evil if she could carry it away'. [Boldrewood in his *The Miner's Right*, 1890]
- *placer*, a chiefly US mining term from American-Spanish *placer*, pronounced *plasser*, meaning a deposit of sand, gravel or earth, or any alluvial detritus, containing gold in particles. This pronunciation of *placer* is in Barbara Kingsolver's contribution (p. 270) about 'place deposit' in a fascinating book *Home Ground-Language for an American Landscape*, edited by Barry Lopez and Debra Gwartney (San Antonio, TX: Trinity University Press, 2006), in which are also gathered brief literary descriptions of natural/manmade features of the landscape in U.S.A. by their best nature writers. We could well do the same for Australia using writers such as Rolf Boldrewood, Judith Wright, Eric Rolls and Tom Griffiths.

One has to admire John Ryan's prodigious and painstaking industry in compiling this long word list with examples from the some ten million words of the gold-relevant Boldrewood texts. He explains that he did this reading some years ago without the benefit of the more recent *Gold! Gold! Gold! - The Language of the Nineteenth Century Australian Gold Rushes*, edited by Bruce Moore (OUP, Australia and NZ, 2000, 224 pages).¹

Thomas Alexander Browne, who wrote as 'Rolf Boldrewood' and came to Australia on a convict ship of which his father was the captain, was born in London in 1826 and died in Melbourne in 1915 aged 88. He migrated to Australia in 1831, at age 5, with his father Sylvester on that convict ship. Tom went to Sydney College, now Sydney Grammar School and his studies included the classics. He married Margaret Maria Riley at Mulgoa near Parramatta on 1 August 1861 a few days before his 35th birthday. He was a squatter in Victoria and on the Murrumbidgee river, hit hard times, and with help in high places became a Police Magistrate and Clerk of Petty Sessions in Gulgong in 1871. Later he was Goldfields Commissioner at Gulgong, which in 1873 had a population of 30,000. By 1881 Gulgong's population had shrunk to fewer than 5,000 and Browne moved to Dubbo as Police Magistrate. There he wrote *Robbery Under Arms* which was serialized in the *Sydney Mail* in 1883 and five years later first published as a book. It has never been out of print.

Meanwhile he had a short time in Armidale, 1884-5, for the health of his wife and family, and so was in charge of this same Rocky River field for a short period. He was soon to be appointed chairman of the Land Licensing Board at Albury, again seeking a more congenial climate, but he was reported in *The Armidale Express* of 2 January 1885, on the eve of departure, as saying that he would always 'think with regret of the fresh mornings and cool nights of New England'.

He was a prolific writer, publishing 21 books and many essays and short stories including two anonymously published handbooks about sheep farming

¹ However, the Bruce Moore volume makes much use of newspapers and other documents, and thus only contains 10-15% of the headwords/ phrases included in the present concordance/ lexicon.

and cattle, the parts of *S. W. Silver and Co's Australian Graziers' Guide*. It seems that three main things influenced Browne to write so much -

- 1) He admired Sir Walter Scott whom he 'always regarded... as the Shakespeare of novelists'. (Letter of 7 November 1901, quoted by Alan Brissenden, introduction to *Rolf Boldrewood – Portable Australian Authors*, UQP, 1979, p. x).
- 2) He remarked that 'My best work was done when I was half-drowned in debt'. (Letter, October 1893, Brissenden, *op. cit.*, p. xi).
- 3) He wrote: 'A habit of noting, almost unconsciously, manner, bearing, dialect, tricks of expression, amongst all sorts and conditions of men provides 'situations'.' (Brissenden, *op. cit.*, p. xviii). Obviously he also had the habit of expressing himself with vigour and colour. And,
- 4) as J.S. Ryan puts it, he 'always wrote and lived with both gusto and compassion' (of Rolf Boldrewood, in Vol.12, of *Armidale and District Historical Society*, on p. 96). .

John Ryan's contributions to *Golden Words* are the culmination of his very long and sustained interest in Rolf Boldrewood and Thunderbolt. His two articles in the *Armidale and District Historical Society Journal (ADHSJ)*, 'Rolf Boldrewood in Armidale' (1969, Vol. 12, *ADHSJ* pp. 86,ff.) and 'Rolf Boldrewood and Lalla Rookh in December 1884' (1992, Vol. 35, *ADHSJ*, p. 47) are only a small part of this interest evidenced by him editing and republishing two of Boldrewood's books.

His somewhat related earlier article 'The Man Who Shot Thunderbolt: His Later Career' (1983, Vol. 26, *ADHSJ*, pp. 119,ff.) contributes an analysis of some elusive governmental documents to the literature of/about Thunderbolt. And, linked to all of this, he refers in the present book to the 'persisting confusion...whether the man shot then was really Fred Ward [and] Whether accepted as fact, or not, this survival is a form of 'resurrection' concept that is found variously in later Australian folklore about several of the more popular bushrangers.' For, of course, Fred Ward has become an elusive figure of myth, much as Robin Hood before him, and Ned Kelly, from the time of his death.

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This book also pays a greatly deserved tribute to Arnold Goode who combines renown for his long accumulated and comprehensive and detailed knowledge of the gold mining at Rocky River with an inexhaustible obligingness to 'show and tell' anyone who is interested. He is a splendid local historian and a model guide, modest in his knowledge and enthusiastic in imparting it. Mayor Ron Filmer refers judiciously in his 'Preface' to Uralla's 'enormous debt of gratitude to Arnold Goode for his on-site interpretations of the past here, thereby keeping alive the deeper understanding of our distinctive and dynamic identity that has come down from the colonial times' (p. x). We might add that all who pass along the New England Highway through Uralla

are, similarly, in debt to this man who has so selflessly saved the historic landscape for us all.

The list of mining words and phrases is a reminder that words are the tools of thought, and were/ are as essential as picks, shovels and cradles to a gold fossicker. For words are always the means of coping with the problems of making progress with our endeavours. Every word and phrase in this list is made up or borrowed and adapted by the polyglot company of miners—drawn from so many lands—much as we still endeavour to improve our physical tools to suit our daily purposes.

When a new term like ‘duffer’ is needed, we find we can use an accepted word with a similar meaning, and in no time it enters common usage as quickly as new technologies, like the internet, mobile phones and flat screens are taken up. The present list is a sparkling display of such ingenuity, and a precious part of our Australian inheritance and particularly of its colonial period’s heroes, struggles, and so their bequest to us, their folk ways now become our savoured folklore.

Ian Johnstone

