LIMINA

Reviews

Ann Blake, *Christina Stead's Politics of Place*, UWA Press, Nedlands, 1999; pp.182; RRP $34.95 paperback.

Christina Stead was long neglected by the Australian literary establishment. Despite having received international recognition, her books were omitted from Australian library collections until the 1960s, a reminder of our parochial past. As a subject of scholarly investigation there is no doubt that Stead presents as a challenging and interesting subject. In this study, Ann Blake revisits Christina Stead and a body of Stead's work through postcolonial theory and the results are necessarily speculative. Throughout the book, Stead's personality seems to exceed and buck at a systematic and structural inquiry. At certain times in her life Stead denied political convictions and affiliations that it might seem reasonable to attribute to her. This brings into focus the intrepid nature of the study.

Blake has constructed the text in two parts, the first being an exploration of the contextual approach, the second an informed analysis of Stead's 'English' fiction. In the introduction Blake outlines her intention to cover three main themes: what the term 'place' includes in Stead's work; the (postcolonial) notion of the displaced writer and England in Stead's fiction. She admits that 'it is much easier to see how Stead's novels do not quite fit the critic's categories than how they do' (p.47) and thus self reflexively highlights the problematic nature of the analysis.

Stead and her husband, William Blake, appear to have lived the definitive postmodern life, wandering and without roots, without national ties. Throughout most of her life Stead was dutifully loyal to her husband upon whom she was heavily reliant. They were, at times, extremely impoverished, fleeing Paris before World War II and leaving Hollywood, where Stead worked briefly as a scriptwriter, in the face of McCarthyism. The couple also experienced the hardships of the housing shortage in postwar London. In an interview after her husband's death, Stead bemoaned the effect that this homeless state had on her professional career. The importance of place in Stead's novels transpire through the layering of her character's points of view and the detailing of a city or setting.

Stead's literary style is described by Blake as a modernist evocation of realism, straddling Stead's interest in representing multiplicity and her passionate belief in the political and economic liberation of the individual. Randall Jarrell referred to Stead's skilled rendering of place as 'the illusion of recognition, an effect of reality, not the thing itself' (p.38). Blake argues that there is always an acute political awareness at the core of this authenticity.

In her analysis of the excolonial, Blake claims that rather than embodying this notion of the exiled, alienated writer Stead's power was in her depiction of England and Empire as old fashioned and doomed. Stead was never an admirer of English society, and she denied any affectations about being a writer. Two of her notable works written about English society are *Cotter's England* and *Miss Herbert (The Suburban Wife)*. The first is acknowledged as one of the great novels of the English working class and the second, an indictment of the follies of the 'respectable' middle class and English literati. With her focus on the internal life of her characters and the psychological battleground of the family, Stead sought to utilise the strength of the novel as a genre that could accommodate an international, local and personal history - what Blake describes as 'documentary realism' (p.98). Stead did not hold out for revolution amongst the English people. She depicted them as the victims of their own blind faith in the glory of Empire and as such, incapable of rising up against capitalist oppressors. This for her was reason enough to relegate England to the dustbin of history.

Blake values Stead's ethical sensibilities, she praises her work as 'an outstanding instance of a sophisticated Marxist aesthetic', as materialist, internationalist, democratic and an expression of 'allegiance to the humanising value of social life' (p.8). In conclusion Blake considers that the demands for social justice represented by Stead are still with us and that it would be a great risk to disregard her work even in hindsight of the 'death of socialism' (p.162). In the current Australian political climate there is little to encourage any kind of optimism about the continuing legacy of the Left that Christina Stead lived by and wrote about.

NATALIE LLOYD
University of Western Australia

Sabine Melchior-Bonnet, *The Mirror: A History*, (trans. Katherine H. Jewett), Routledge, New York, 2001; pp.308; RRP $57.20 hardcover.

The field of cultural studies and cultural history is booming at present with the publication of texts exploring the minutiae of such topics as tears, dust, the penis, corsets, the fart, and intoxication. As a contribution to this diverse and eclectic field, Sabine Melchior-Bonnet's T*he Mirror: A History* is filled with fascinating anecdotes, references, and illustrations about the cultural impact of mirrors and is intriguing to the general reader as well as to the scholar. It will no doubt provide endless inspiration to Lacanian theorists in addition to art historians and those interested in notions of consciousness and the construction of personal identities.

The Mirror is overwhelmingly Euro-centric and focuses on what we know today as mirrors – flat pieces of glass with a silvered back that create a clear, non-distorting surface. Only passing reference is made to earlier and alternative forms of mirrors, such as pools of water and polished steel or stone, and their cultural impact. This focus also determines that the history of mirrors in non-European countries is barely mentioned. The introduction of European mirror technology to other cultures is also not discussed, which is a great pity, for it would be interesting to compare the introduction of mirrors to other disruptive western technologies, such as photography, in non-western cultures.

The first half of the book deals with the history of the production and manufacture of mirrors and this is fascinating economic and political history, although it is perhaps dealt with in too much detail in terms of the devious scheming in Venice's attempts to retain its pre-eminence in the industry. This material does have its value, however, in exposing the extent to which espionage and intrigue have been central to commercial society and the industrialisation process in Renaissance Europe.

Industrialisation allowed for mass production and the transference of the use of mirrors from the aristocracy to the bourgeoisie and eventually to mass use by the lower classes. This broadening of the social use of the mirror coincided with the loss of the reflection's supernatural power as the identification of the self as a reflected image became a common rather than extraordinary experience. Mirror symbolism moved from religious and spiritual connotations to secular constructions of identity, individuality, beauty, and vanity.

The cultural impact of the mirror is the major focus of the second part of the book, yet it is this section that is most frustrating to the reader. Melchior-Bonnet moves too quickly through historical eras and their aesthetic preferences and stylistic indicators with too little reference back to the technical changes in mirror production that were discussed in the first half. It is difficult to trace how leaps in technology, and hence gains in mass production and cost reduction, relate to major changes in social behaviours related to the use of mirrors.

One of the massive social changes brought about between the Renaissance and the industrial revolution has been a dramatic increase in individual self-consciousness, and Melchior-Bonnet attributes this largely to the use of the mirror. The performance of self-consciousness has become an endemic feature of modern society, yet it is revealed as a relatively recent phenomenon – prior to the common use of mirrors people simply did not know what they looked like and so were not consumed by the idea of seeing themselves as others seem them. It is interesting to note the impact of the mirror in the context of the development of domestic architecture, in particular the bathroom and bedroom, where private grooming takes place.

Melchior-Bonnet claims that there is no such thing as an 'objective mirror' (p.244). In earlier times, the difficulty in manufacturing even mirrors meant that people always saw themselves distorted, or blurred, or discoloured due to imperfections in their mirrors. As technology improved, and mirrors that produced physically accurate images became common and affordable, the infatuations of vanity and subjectivity meant that people replaced external distortions with internal ones – seeing themselves so often became a burden, and as a consequence of constant self-consciousness became actors, forever projecting their best image to themselves as well as to others.

The use of mirrors as tools and as subjects in European painting is discussed briefly in this context, which provides an insight to how various techniques of representation have been achieved in works like Jan van Eyck's *The Arnolfini Marriage* (1434) and Albrecht Dürer's *Self-Portrait* (1500), particularly in relation to the explosion of individuality and subjectivity seen in the wider social use of mirrors.

The Mirror should have received a thorough edit after translation: the English text is at times awkward and the tone is occasionally more journalistic than academic, which rests uncomfortably with the complex subject matter. The book verges on overload in terms of the number of anecdotes and quotations it provides, particularly as many are provided without due consideration of the extent to which the Renaissance scribbling classes informed or reflected prevailing attitudes and values. The Euro-centric focus is problematic given the cross-cultural, interdisciplinary nature of much current work in this area but, given this limitation, Melchior-Bonnet presents material that deserves careful re-reading.

BRIAN WARD
Curtin University of Technology

Bill Lancaster, *The Department Store: A Social History*, Leicester University Press, London, 2000 (Second edition); pp.212; RRP US$21.95 paperback.

If the quality of academic historical monographs can be measured by their appeal to the general readers who peruse the contents of my coffee table, then Bill Lancaster's *The Department Store: A Social History* would surely win an award for innovative social research. Rarely has such widespread interest been shown in the subject matter of such a specific academic text. The appeal of the department store to late twentieth century western consumers is self evident but, as Lancaster notes, the historical development of the environment in which we shop has received far less attention than the economics that define mass consumption and the complexities and ambiguities of the consumer behaviour that drives capitalist societies.

In a clear, dry, spare tone and style that is both formal and approachable Lancaster explores the extraordinary development of the department store from a British perspective, with sustained comparisons to France and the United States of America, from the 1840s to the 1940s with some brief comments about the postwar era. Lancaster demonstrates a flair for social history through careful attention to documented historical fact filtered through respect for the transient customs of social existence that so deeply define and inform social eras. He considers, for example, both the development of department stores from their drapery store origins and the myths and assumptions concerning morality in the mixed-gender workplace of the department store in the late Victorian period.

With sensible judgement *The Department Store* is informed primarily by examination of historical evidence and discussion of existing debate on the subject of mass consumption rather than the blinkered view of a single theoretical or ideological framework. *The Department Store* pays scant regard to 'judgmental' (p.166) or 'vulgar' (p.178) Marxism or the 'arrogant, conspiratorial interpretations' (p.164) of psychoanalysts, literary theorists, and postmodernists. Indeed, the only criticism that can be levelled against Lancaster is that he employs what may be termed 'traditional' historical methods in the pursuit of a form of social analysis so often convoluted by indulgent intellectual baggage. The result makes for refreshing and sometimes surprising reading.

The Department Store is arranged thematically and attention is devoted to the general history of mass retailing, international influences, gender issues, economic and legal concerns, the internal geography, design and architecture of individual stores, the geography of stores within cities and urban centres, and the sophisticated industrial relations developments fuelled by the large, specialised workforces created by successful department stores. Religion and class distinctions also inform the discussion. Of particular concern is the rapid development in the nineteenth century of an urban middle class that functions as both a customer and employee base for the proliferation of department stores. In this respect the industrial revolution is fundamental in bringing into being the modes of production which enabled individual stores to begin supplying standard product lines. Perhaps the only weak point in the text is the vagueness with which the subject of branding is discussed. The gradual change from store-branded goods (unique to each store) to name-branded goods (equally available at competing stores) is not adequately addressed and the marketing of the brand of individual stores is given patchy attention.

The function of the department store as a public spectacle or exhibition in a pivotal urban space and the act of window shopping as a form of entertainment, particularly for women, is given careful attention. From the point of view of staff, the fantastical environment of the department store is both conservative, with paternalistic control of staff, and radical with its early support for women's suffrage. Perhaps the most obvious transformation from a contemporary point of view is that of the restricted space of the early shop floor, where browsing was strictly limited, goods were stored rather than displayed, and staff were omnipresent to the open spaces of modern shops where intervention by staff is minimal, viewing and handling of merchandise is encouraged without commitment to purchase, and image and display is everything. Incidentally, for younger readers *The Department Store* is informative in providing explanations for many of the eccentricities of department store behaviour as it is depicted in the British television comedy *Are You Being Served?*

Given the male dominance of commerce and industry, one of the delicious ironies defined by the novel environment of the department store, where women employees quickly gained in social status and economic empowerment, and where women customers have always been the driving force in consumer spending, is that stores have sometimes resorted to providing separate entrances for men or men's rooms distinct from the 'feminine' space of the store to attract intimidated male shoppers. *The Department Store* is recommended for providing an illuminating insight into the social and economic history of an ever-changing cultural institution.

BRIAN WARD
Curtin University of Technology

Tony Mason and Richard Holt, *Sport in Britain 1945-2000*, Blackwell, Oxford, 2000; pp.256; RRP $15.99 paperback.

In recent years the history of leisure has attracted considerable attention from both academics and the wider community and a large number of publications have appeared examining sporting history in Great Britain. These have often been chronological accounts detailing the history of a particular sport or sporting organisation. Cricket, football, rugby and the clubs associated with them have largely been focused upon, while other sports have all too often been neglected. Histories of sport have also frequently failed to place British sport in its wider cultural, historical and social context. Richard Holt and Tony Mason attempt to correct this imbalance, not only looking at cricket, football and rugby but also athletics, boxing, golf, rowing, tennis and swimming and the impact of sport in the development of postwar British society in *Sport in Britain 1945-2000*. Holt and Mason have individually published widely on various aspects of the history of sport and currently are both members of the International Centre for Sports History and Culture, De Montford University, Leicester. *Sport in Britain* is itself part of a larger series of historical works overseen by the Institute of

Contemporary British History, published under the broader title *Making Contemporary Britain*. The aim of the series is to correct the perceived neglect of postwar British history in schools, universities and wider society and accordingly, the series is aimed at school students, undergraduates and those with a more general interest in history. Titles published under this series, state the authors, are not designed to be works of originality but overviews of the state of historical knowledge on each topic, presented in a clear and readable style. Not only does Holt and Mason's study fulfil these aims but they have also managed to break new ground producing a history that makes a valuable contribution to the historiography of sport.

Holt and Mason consistently strike at the heart of the historical enterprise throughout *Sport in Britain* by examining ideas of change and continuity over time. The authors assess how sport in Britain has changed over 50 years. Beginning with a predominantly factual account of grass roots participation in sport, Holt and Mason argue that the postwar period in Britain has seen a major change occur in British sporting life with the active involvement of unprecedented numbers of Britons in a growing diversity of sports. However this overall change seems to have been tempered by a remarkable continuity - the type of sport that participants have actively engaged in, has been determined primarily by class and occupation rather than gender, ethnicity or age. For example, hunting still remains the sport of the upper classes, while football, at least on a local level, is largely played by working class men and has been since the game's conception.

In assessing the changes and continuities in British sport, the authors argue that the British sporting experience can only be understood if the ideal of amateurism and the influence of professionalism are examined. Chapter Two focuses on the post-war rebuilding of British society by examining the 1948 London Olympics. This proves to be a fascinating study as a still austere Britain attempted to cope with the staging of an international competition. Despite the Olympics the reconstruction of British sport was secondary to the wider reconstruction of British life and the beginning of the postwar period saw sport in Britain still firmly influenced by the amateur ideal. Chapter Three discusses the concept of amateurism further and its eventual demise in any serious sporting competition. The loss of the amateur ideal and the subsequent growth of professionalism are the largest change that has occurred in British sport over the last 50 years. However, the authors argue that in the world of ordinary club sport, amateurism as an ideal thrives and thus the conflict between change and continuity over time is once again examined.

Professionalism in sport and the impact of British society on the professional sportsperson form the basis of the next two chapters. Chapter Four and its focus on the professional sportsperson – who they were, what sports they were found in, what their earnings amounted to and how this has changed over the last 50 years, makes for fascinating reading. Chapter Five examines the role played by the media in creating and at times destroying the professional sportsperson and how the media has itself influenced sport in the postwar period, creating the basis for the idea that sport is a business and in turn, profoundly threatening the ideals of amateurism.

The notion of identity, in particular the allegiance of football fans to teams largely based on geographical location throughout much of the postwar period, is examined in Chapter Six. The notion of identity allows the authors to explore the loyalties of Britons not only in England but also in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The final chapter of *Sport in Britain* discusses government policy with regard to sport and how this has dramatically changed over time. At the start of the postwar period, a government could intervene in British sport but rarely did. As the increasing popularity of sport became noticeable and the value of sport became recognised, no British government could afford to ignore it and hence government policy became increasingly interventionist. What football fan could forget Thatcher's controversial identity card scheme proposal after the 1985 Heysel Stadium Disaster in Brussels?

Sport in Britain is an excellent historical account of the postwar period in British sport. The authors emphasise the diversity of British sport and provide detail on a number of sports. They explore the tensions between change and continuity by examining the ideals of amateurism and the advent of professionalism. Holt and Mason have presented a history that is well researched and well written and consequently should be of interest to both historians and sports fans alike.

EMMA GROOM
University of Western Australia

Tony Hughes-D'Aeth, *Paper Nation: The Story of the Picturesque Atlas of Australasia 1886-1888*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 2001; pp.262; RRP $59.95 hardcover.

This book started its life as a distinction PhD in the English Department at the University of Western Australia, and its reputation as a fine work in this form has already been established through Greg Dening's discussion of it at a National Library of Australia seminar in 2000. Thus, this book is particularly interesting to a postgraduate audience seeking examples of how to translate a thesis into a readable text. *Paper Nation* is almost a biography of a book, however, not in the material culture sense of following the life of a book from publication to the present. More it seeks to understand the conditions and culture of a society that enabled its production and created a market for the *Picturesque Atlas*. That is, while the book itself is a material item, its meanings and nuances are derived from the shifting nature of the culture that produced it in relation to its final content. Hughes-D'Aeth's analysis over 100 years on enables a reflection on many aspects of the context and content of this important publication.

The *Picturesque Atlas* was published at the cusp of technological change with the invention of the half-tone printing press and wet plate photography and arose out of debates about the idea of an imagined nation. Hughes D'Aeth places the conception and production of the *Atlas* clearly within its function as a preface to the emergence of the idea of a federated Australia, albeit united peacefully in text and image between two book covers as a *Paper Nation*. He provides detailed contextual information on the book trade, the people and ideas behind the publication, and the technical, social and political environment that enabled its production. He interweaves comments from the *Atlas'* reception and consumption with the original intent of its producers, and provides detailed discussions of significant words in the title of the book – nation, picturesque, Australasia and Atlas – in relation to its content with masterful and eloquent prose. Throughout, he brings a clear understanding to the cultural and literary theories which have influenced his analysis. Thus one is left with a clear sense of the debates in which the *Atlas* was enmeshed, as well as those it sought to stimulate.

Alongside the cultural contexts of its production and analyses of the meanings the text of the *Atlas* contains, *Paper Nation* includes a chapter specifically looking at where the idea of the picturesque, as defined by the creators of the *Atlas*, is most hotly contested. This adds another layer of depth to the contextual analysis of images and many of the fine reproductions that are scattered through the pages. In this chapter Huges-D'Aeth looks behind the process of translating images into a publishable format through the engraving process and notes that only two sets of photographs – of the moon and Aboriginal people – are acknowledged as deriving from photographs. Thus, the captions of the illustrations become evidence in their own right. Through this he introduces contemporary debate concerning the role of the artist engraver versus the science of photography, and the status of Aboriginal people as scientific objects.

The *Picturesque Atlas* emerged from nineteenth century debates about nationhood and national identity. Likewise the origins of *Paper Nation* can equally be placed within cultural and theoretical debates about the nature and desires of the nation of Australia today, along with its receipt of a publishing subsidy from the Centenary of Federation Fund. Much of the author's critique comes from an incisive eye and meticulous research that refocuses the reader back onto the past, to a time when an Australian nation was still part of a geographical imagination. Most notably, for an early career scholar, the author draws on contemporary literary and theoretical debates in a manner that illuminates rather than obscures the primary source material under discussion. That it succeeds in achieving this using the clarity of prose that it does is a testament to the communication skills of the author.

The only omission in the book, is a call from a paleographer's heart. The original *Picturesque Atlas* was a large and weighty three-volume work with which one could be truly interactive and literally immerse oneself within its large-format pages. While there are constant visual reminders of the *Atlas'* original design and typeface as they are replicated in *Paper Nation*, the reader is given no sense of scale of the original *Atlas*. That *Paper Nation* is physically (but not intellectually) a mere babe compared to the *Atlas* it analyses could have so easily been clarified with a scaled photograph of a complete page or its original physical details outlined in an appendix. That minor point aside, this book is, like its parent, an attractive artifact in itself – one which is beautifully designed and uses high quality art paper, again replicating the original *Atlas*. It should grace the shelves of libraries, and academics from disciplines including literary and cultural theory, history, geography and visual studies.

Of equal importance it should be read by those looking at translating ‘thesis-ese’ into something much more readable.

JOANNA SASSOON
Curtin University of Technology

Carolyn Polizzotto, *A Trick of the Light*, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, Fremantle, 2001; pp.216; RRP $27.95 hardcover.

Another little gem from Carolyn Polizzotto. *A Trick of the Light* follows the Perth author’s award-winning *Pomegranate Season*, published by the same house in 1998. Both books come in attractive covers that should make the publisher proud. Similar to her first work, Polizzotto’s latest offering is a seemingly eclectic collection of flashbacks, this time focused on her experience of growing up in ‘baby-boomer’ Australia, in a country enveloped by the immediate memories of the Second World War, and, at the same time, repressing the horror of the conflict beneath the shallow veneer of burgeoning suburban developments and rise of consumer society.

‘Why are so many baby boomers choosing to write memoirs while still only in their fifties?’, muses Polizzotto on the book’s cover, and provides her own response: ‘I wondered whether there was a paradox – whether they were doing so not because they could remember their childhoods, but because they couldn’t.’ It is as genuine a response as any author of memoirs could muster. Polizzotto wisely alerts us to the slippery nature of memory, to the socially constituted character of what we call ‘experience’, to the inherent unreliability of memoirs, if one must be blunt (and poach Clive James) in piecing together the historical jig-saw components of a life in 1950s Australia.

To an historian for example, this message may seem overly pessimistic, whereas to a writer possessing Polizzotto’s generous gifts of perception and expression, it comes as no surprise to discover that today’s baby-boomers are bereft of language needed to forge more ‘reliable’ narratives of the 1950s: narratives they could call their own. One inevitably returns to the importance of language in the constitution of individual and collective social memories, and Polizzotto writes:

> My brother and I, my sister who came later, we and all our generation were the currency of the 1950s. We were our parents lost innocence. Their teens and twenties, gone to war, were set to be our future. With us the speculators bought and sold. Land, orchards, cars and fridges. We were the reward of war and our happiness was the price of peace. The fifties? *We were its language*. (p.56, original emphasis)

She continues in a more explicit manner: ‘The memories of my generation, though, are of the stories of the Second World War, not of the war itself’ (p.59). There are no reliable memories, of the Second World War or any other ‘pivotal’ human catastrophe; what solely remains are the stories which themselves construct our memories of suburban childhood, stories which shape the memories forming the cornerstones of our life narratives. There are no words, writes Polizzotto, which the baby-boomer generation can use to forge its own memories, because ‘children spoke less, and less was said to them’ (p.60).

More significant than simply affirming the malleability of memory, Polizzotto charts a map of Australian 1950s when women were women, men were men, and children knew their place too – a time when admitting to having wog blood flowing through one’s family tree had the consequences akin to today identifying oneself, for example, as an Afghani refugee. Much of 1950s ‘Australia’, if one by that name assumes the Anglo majority at the time, poured scorn on those who were ‘different’ (while some part of that same ‘Australia’ undoubtedly refused to play into the racist politics, just like today). Painful memories are often repressed, even if they are doomed to resurface. And histories are (almost) always written by the winners, because only the winners’ memories are preserved in recognition of their ‘reliability’.

Polizzotto does not only wish to offer an alternative historical account of growing up in the 1950s. This book performs on a higher level of thought; it leads us away from remembering how it was, towards reckoning how and why we *think* it was like this way back when … while memories play with us like the tricks of the light.

JASMINA BRANKOVICH
University of Western Australia

Jennifer Rutherford, *The Gauche Intruder: Freud, Lacan and the White Australian Fantasy*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 2001; pp.252; RRP $32.95 paperback.

This is a strange book to review. Interspersed with discussions of Jacques Lacan, Sigmund Freud, the Australian literary canon and the national character are autobiographical interludes. Author Jennifer Rutherford remembers her Aboriginal Aunt Thursa, describes a dream of a paper dragon with a mysterious stranger and writes an imaginary letter to Tim Winton in the name of a female (non) character from his 1994 novel *The Riders*.

Striving as I have been to adopt a distanced academic style in my own research and writing, these were jarring authorial interventions. Rutherford is offering a Lacanian psychoanalytical interpretation to explain the 'White Australian Fantasy'. Lacan employed the notion of the 'pass': making the analytic experience the subject of analysis by other analysts. So I will respond in kind, situating myself within this fantasy while writing this on a train between Perth and Kalgoorlie. If you find this review mawkish, chances are you will have a similar response to *The Gauche Intruder*.

Fantasy in the Lacanian sense is the identity a child assumes in relation to the mother. But this identity is also a response by that child to the *Other* – the stranger whose desires are unfathomable. The 'White Australian Fantasy' of Australia as a good and neighbourly nation is bound up with an aggression towards the *Other* (Aboriginal dispossession, immigration restriction), and an experience of emptiness, or nothingness. Patrick White's *Riders in the Chariot* describes a 'great Australian emptiness' which according to Rutherford evokes the 'void at the heart of the Australian Symbolic'(p.178). This refers not just to the bush, but also a suburbia in which everyone disappears into homogeneity. White's novel culminates in an anti-Semitic murder in suburban Australia.

Staring out my train window I can see the Australian bush in green and brown with pale white trees, burnt branches with the soil turning a deep red as the sun sinks below the horizon. Inside the carriage most of the passengers are 'White Anglo'. Many are old enough to remember when the White Australian Fantasy had specific policies to back it up. There is a friendly, easy-going atmosphere between people that seems to bear out Rutherford's 'Australian Edict' – 'Love thy neighbour as thine equal' (p.96). The air-conditioned carriage conveys us across a landscape empty of white people.

At the moment the Howard government is riding high in the opinion polls after dispatching the Australian Navy to intercept boatloads of refugees before they touch 'our' soil. As good a demonstration as any of what Rutherford calls White Australia's fear of 'otherness' (p.131). Our neighbour is our equal – but must be the same. Rutherford opens the book by interviewing a One Nation polling booth worker in Gatton, Queensland during the 1998 election. He stresses the importance of neighbourliness to his cause. 'You're my neighbour. If you had a flat tire I'd help you' (p.6). One Nation, says Rutherford, seeks to restore the moral community of the 'good' nation. Australia's unique, inherent goodness has been defamed by Aborigines, foreigners and intellectual, professional urban elites (p.7).

A key Lacanian concept employed here is *jouissance*. This has no precise Modern English translation but broadly means 'enjoyment'. However it is an enjoyment which is consciously experienced as suffering, and unconsciously as satisfaction. Rutherford refers to 'aggressive *jouissance*' – a will to destruction similar to Sigmund Freud's 'death drive' in *Civilisation and Its Discontents* (p.26). A nation that assumes the power to do good also assumes the power to decide what is good. The 'good intentions' of the native child removal policies come to mind.

This is a thought-provoking book, and Rutherford is correct describing One Nation as a 'moral movement' – an aspect that eluded many commentators. However the reader will have to wade through a lot of psychoanalytic theory and gain a working knowledge of Australian literature (*The Fortunes of Richard Mahoney*, *My Brother Jack*, *Robbery Under Arms*, among others). The text contains plenty of untranslated Frenchisms which always annoy me as a monolingual Australian (*gauche*, by the way, means wanting in tact or grace of manner). Rutherford does not make things easy for non-specialists. Despite the blurb's claim that this book is 'genuinely accessible', I doubt the Gatton poll worker will be reading it.

Despite Rutherford having done part of her research overseas there is little international context for this 'White Australian Fantasy' that surely has parallels in other settler societies. As I write this US President George W. Bush has declared a decidedly vague War on Terrorists in which nations are either with 'us' or against 'us'. Whatever one feels about the justice of this war – it is clearly an example of 'aggressive *jouissance*' – assumptions of goodness coupled with a will to destruction. Australia is providing wholehearted support.

TIM DYMOND
University of Western Australia

Damien Broderick, *Earth is but a Star: Excursions through Science Fiction to the Far Future*, University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands, 2001; pp.466; RRP $34.95 paperback.

'In the long run we are all dead' said Keynes, and Damien Broderick's anthology of short stories and essays *The Earth is but a Star: Excursions though Science Fiction to the Far Future* is about the very, *very* long run. So long that not only will we be dead, but so will all our descendants. The 'dark magic of the far future' according to the foreword by Brian Aldiss, derives from its being 'unknowable' (p.x).

> Perhaps by writing and reading of far futures we reclaim something of eternity for our inward spirit. There is a research paper here waiting to be written: On the Rise of Far Future Literature Coincident with the decline of Christian Belief in Eternal Life. (p.x)

The absence of such a paper in *The Earth is but a Star* highlights the flaws in Broderick's approach.

> The stories in this book' he writes, 'range from the comparatively primitive … to some sharing a measure of thematic sophistication still rarely seen in general fiction. Linked critical essays explain why they matter, simple and complex alike, their lineage, how they work, and perhaps more importantly how they fail … and what their limits show us as we rage already towards our unimaginable future. (p.3)

Broderick seems to have conceived this volume as a strictly literary exercise. However the subject demands a more thorough discussion of what the 'far future' actually means. Broderick claims this as a

pioneering anthology of a 'new genre' (p.6). But it is nowhere made clear why it deserves such a designation. Constructing the volume around alternating stories and literary essays makes for a repetitive and strangely antiseptic read.

The problem with 'far futurist' writing, as essayist Alice K. Turner points out, is that 'their dying suns and sorcerous souls and collapsed societies … look astonishingly like the European Dark ages with a filigree of fantastic futuristic frou-frou' (p.325). Indeed many of these stories, particularly John Brunner's 'The Earth is but a Star' and Jack Vance's 'Mazirian the Magician' could be set a 'long time ago in a galaxy far, far away' without any real changes to their storylines or plots. The far future is colourful background rather than the central conceit.

The best stories in this collection – Poul Anderson's 'Final Chapter', Brian Aldiss's 'The Failed Men', Robert Silverburg's 'Dancers in the Time-Flux', Steven Baxter's 'Inherit the Earth' – all integrate characters, situations and concerns from recognisable historical humanity. Silverburg's tale about the resurrection of a sixteenth century Dutch adventurer effectively gives the reader a connection to a 'far future' that is alien yet clearly our own.

The essays that come closest to nailing down the 'far future' are by Brian Stableford and Stanislaw Lem. Stableford tracks literary, philosophical and scientific writing about 'far futures'. However in many ways his essay is a frustrating read as it only highlights the limitations of the rest of the volume. The writings of Freeman Dyson, J.B.S Haldane, J.D. Bernal and others cited by Stableford are surely interesting enough to warrant a reprinting. Lem's essay on Olaf Stapleton's *Star Maker* is one of the few pieces that manage to convey a sense of cosmic grandeur while moving into the 'far future'. It would also be useful to acknowledge that the contemporary age is still *someone's* 'far future'. Rosaleen Love's essay 'Star Drover' comes closest to this at the end of the book.

The volume might also have benefited from more controversy. Russell Blackford's essay is a vigorous defence of Arthur C. Clarke against the late George Turner and Tom Moylan: 'Politically focussed critics … troubled or confused by far-future fiction' (p.37). With the effort Blackford makes to refute them, it would have made for a livelier volume to actually read these or similar essays.

It is not that Broderick has not chosen some fine stories, or that the 'far future' as a genre is not worth exploring. However a shorter, more focused volume might have provided a clearer idea of how exactly it warrants being called a genre. You cannot fault the ambition, but the central idea is too vague to hold the collection together.

TIM DYMOND
University of Western Australia

David Trend (ed.), *Reading Digital Culture*, Blackwell Publishers, Oxford, 2001; pp.384; RRP $15.99 paperback.

David Trend's collection *Reading Digital Culture* brings together many of the most important figures involved in the explosive academic debates surrounding technology, society and, more importantly, the interrelations between the two. From Donna Haraway, Sadie Plant, N. Katherine Hayles and Sherry Turkle to Paul Virilio, Hakim Bey, Arthur Kroker and Howard Rheingold, this anthology seeks not to explicate a consistent reading of technology, but rather to evoke the contentiousness of any position in relation to the so-called digital world. In breaking down the components of the anthology's title, Trend is explicit in his task: *Reading* is used to evoke a sustained critical approach; *Digital* refers to both the 'real' technological world as well as the related rhetorical mechanisms and cyber-spaces; and *Culture* points to the human context in which all things digital exist, and through which all things digital need be examined.

Given the breadth of debates surrounding cyberculture(s), compartmentalising the anthology into various themes or issues ostensibly appears either overly ambitious or reductive, but Trend manages to give some semblance of order to a realm of discourse which often struggles to be the very opposite. The first section, 'The Machine in the Garden', seeks to contextualise digital culture in both historical and cultural terms. The historical context of Vannevar Bush's post-World War Two vision of the computerised 'memex' and Sadie Plant's exploration of Ada Lovelace and Charles Babbage is mixed with cultural commentaries ranging from the optimistic, though ironic, cyborg manifesto of Donna Haraway though to Paul Virilio's eerily dystopian 'Speed and Information: Cyberspace Alarm!'. The second part, 'Knowledge and Communication in a Digital Age', explores what Trend calls the rhetorical 'rosetta stone' function of digital culture in that it appears to be able to translate any desire into a reified form, be it financial (e-commerce), spiritual (Micheal Heim's 'Erotic Ontology of Cyberspace'), scholarly (hypertext and/as critical theory), military (Hakim Bey's 'Information War') or technologically innovative (Silicon Valley). The following segment, 'Living in the Immaterial World', functions as a huge flashing red-lettered warning sign about the utopian rhetoric of the digital world and, in particular, the effects of the global economy and the 'digital divide' – that is, the social and economic disenfranchisement felt by those who are not among the less than four percent of the world's population currently online. Parts four and five, 'Performing Identity in Cyberspace' and 'Searching for Community Online', critically engage with the ideas of the online citizen – or netizen – and online community or cyberdemocracy. These two sections deal with the digital in relation to questions of race, gender, sexuality and class on both the individual and collective levels. Julian Dibbell's article on the relationship between RL (real life) and online community in this section wins the prize for the most provocative title, namely 'A Rape in Cyberspace; or How an Evil Clown, a Haitian Trickster Spirit, Two Wizards, and a Cast of Dozens Turned a Database into a Society'. The final section, 'Reading Digital Culture', contains commentaries which critique digital culture as a whole but also a rhetorically constructed one. The essays by N. Katherine Hayles and Andrew Ross are of particular impact, traversing numerous examples from a number of media (albeit all of them now considered digital or heading in that direction) with a refined critical gaze.

As this brief overview of *Reading Digital Culture* suggests, Trend's anthology is both ambitious in its scope and comprehensive in its delivery in terms of both commentators and issues. However, a few small points of criticism are worth mentioning. Trend's inclusion of William Gibson's short story 'Johnny Mnemonic', for example, ostensibly appears a bold statement about the use of science fiction to critique digital culture. However, despite both Heim and Hayles addressing Gibson's work and the inclusion of the short story, nowhere in the anthology is the use of science fiction, or fiction at all, contextualised or analysed as a critical tool. This lack becomes all the more curious since Donna Haraway's article in the anthology, 'A Manifesto for Cyborgs', originally contained such a contextualisation of science fiction. Trend chose only to include excerpts, but none of these touch on Haraway's use and analysis of science fiction as a critical tool. Similarly, when a whole section is devoted to the performance of identity in cyberspace, the lack of an excerpt from Judith Bulter's work, especially her theorisation of performativity as a critical concept, is regrettable.

Despite these minor quibbles, however, Trend has managed to collect an exemplary array of critiques and commentaries relating to digital culture and presented them in an accessible and provocative manner. *Reading Digital Culture* will undoubtably find a place on a wide range of undergraduate courses not least of all because this collection is balanced enough to predominantly provoke questions, not deliver unproblematic answers. As Trend argues, the use of *Reading Digital Culture* lies in that it leaves readers 'refusing to settle on any simple or singular explanation for a phenomenon as complex and multi-dimensional as digital culture' (p. 54).

TAMA LEAVER
University of Western Australia

Vincent P. Pecora (ed.), *Nations and Identities: Classic Readings*, Blackwell Publishers, Massachusetts, 2001; pp.379; RRP $15.99 paperback.

Introducing this anthology, Vincent Pecora is not deluded about the ambitious nature of the project. He likens the task of defining the nation and nationalism to the famous query about time posed by Augustine: 'If no one asks me, I know; if I want to explain it to someone who does ask me, I do not know' (p.1). The collection of writings that follows this early confession offers a comprehensive survey of the concepts of the nation and identity. Launched with Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan*, written in 1651, and concluded with Edward Said's 1993 work, *Culture and Imperialism*, this study traverses the intellectual milieu of several centuries.

The value of this work, to the scholar and student alike, is that key documents – those that have influenced and shaped contemporary understandings of nation and national identity – are collected together to provide easy access to the history of these elusive concepts. Pecora's extensive analysis of the main theoretical issues in his opening chapter, including imperialism and post-colonialism, ethnicity, primordialism and modernity, sets the stage for the often challenging works that follow. In tracing the historic use of concepts of the nation, Pecora discusses intriguing issues such as the European Union, the creation of the state of Israel and the link between nation and state in the Axis powers of World War Two. The role of religion, government and race in nationalist discourse is investigated by Pecora. Examples are given from a multitude of national histories: classical Greece and Rome, post-colonial India, France in the Third Republic, the collapse of the Soviet empire in 1989 – the list appears endless.

Those familiar with contemporary theoretical discourse on 'nation' and 'identity' will recognise authors such as Ernest Gellner, Benedict Anderson, Anthony D. Smith and Homi K. Bhabha. Yet also incorporated in the 'Contemporary Perspectives' section is the writing of Salman Rushdie, author of the renowned and controversial novel *Midnight's Children*, exploring issues of post-colonialism and transcultural / transnational identity. 'There was a riddle I wanted to try and answer ... *Does India exist*?' (p.319, emphasis in original). In a fascinating article, 'The Riddle of Midnight: India, August 1987', Rushdie examines the 'politics of religious hatred' (p.319) – illustrated by the responses of Hindu and Muslim Indians to the question of the Babri Masjid mosque, a site claimed for its religious significance by both of India's major religious groups. So too, Eavan Boland, a major contemporary Irish poet, examines the nation from her perspective as a woman writing in a male-dominated national literary tradition. Reflecting on her early impressions of Irish poetry, she writes:

> The women in their poems were often passive, decorative, raised to emblematic status. This was especially true where the women and the idea of the nation were mixed...Long after it was necessary, Irish poetry had continued to trade in the exhausted fictions of the nation; had allowed those fictions to edit ideas of womanhood and modes of remembrance. (pp.356-357)

The incorporation of such sources into this work emphasises that theoretical thoughts on the 'nation' and 'identity' do not exist in a vacuum but pervade our culture: engagement with these concepts is not solely academic.

Understandings of nation, nationalism and identity, explored through culture, politics and art, is not limited in the text to contemporary discourse. Indeed, extracts from the 1897 work of the prominent African-American intellectual, W.E.B. Du Bois; the works of V.I. Lenin, Woodrow Wilson and Virginia Woolf, all contribute to the reader's understanding of the concepts within a historical and cultural framework. The inclusion of works by philosophers, historians, political figures, poets, novelists and journalists makes this edited collection an indispensable tool for those wishing to engage with the concepts of 'nation' and 'identity'. And let's face it, nationalism and national identity are unlikely to decline in relevance anytime soon – knowing some of the history of these terms will allow us to better understand their power in the present and future.

TRACY MCDIARMID
University of Western Australia

Malcolm Smith, *Britain and 1940: History, Myth and Popular Memory*, Routledge, London, 2000; pp.178; RRP $31.90 paperback.

The inclusion of films such as *Passport to Pimlico* (1949), *The Cruel Sea* (1952) and *The Dambusters* (1955) in the British Film Institute's 'Top 100 British Films of the Twentieth Century' suggests that Britain's national identity still resonates with myths and memories of World War Two. Malcolm Smith's work analyses the myths of 1940 that have infused British postwar popular memory and continue to evolve to suit the political, social and cultural climate of the present. Smith opens with the statement that he offers 'not so much a history book but a book *about* history' (p.1) – his interest is not in debunking the popular understanding of 1940 but rather in exploring how interpretations of this experience have shaped Britain, in both the past and present.

Smith acknowledges the work of Angus Calder, Tom Harrisson and Corelli Barnett in challenging the 'facts' of world war two that contributed to the popular myths of 'the Blitz', 'Dunkirk' and 'Winston Churchill', and yet emphasises that he does not share a common objective with these historians. Rather than concerning himself with what 'really happened', and presenting what he dubs to be a 'counter-factual argument' to dispel dominant memories, Smith explores why 1940 has been such a rich source of myths and 'how they were reworked in subsequent, and different, times' (p.149).

Smith's analysis of 1940, oddly enough, starts with an examination of Britain after World War One. This chapter, entitled 'The Projection of War, 1918 to 1939', explores myths of the 'next war' – myths founded on the fears of the British public and political leaders alike. The 1914-1918 experience of total war emphasised the necessity of the state as an institution, guaranteeing its future involvement in public life, and the risks to the public with the introduction of the bomber. Smith argued that these new preoccupations provoked powerful myths that contributed to Britain's policy of appeasement in the 1930s and set the stage for the myths of 1940.

Myths do not work in just one direction. Just as popular concerns during the interwar years influenced the reception of the events of 1940, so too the events of 1940 caused a reinterpretation of the myths of the interwar years. Smith writes: 'central to the mythic structure of 1940 is the view of the interwar years associated with it, the sense of 1940 as a new beginning' (p.50). The myth of Dunkirk, asserts Smith, derived much of its meaning as a reaction against interwar popular sentiments about the 'next war'. Anti-war and 'peace in our time' sentiments shifted and the Guilty Men myth became dominant. Smith claims that just as Dunkirk symbolised civilian sailors triumphing over military catastrophe, the many 'reasserting their primacy over the elite' (p.51) was symbolised by the decline of Chamberlain's power. J.B. Priestley's radio broadcasts and the popular Boulting brother's film *Dawn Guard* (1940) illustrate the commonly held view that 'the mistakes which had brought the country to its present impasse should not be repeated' (p.50). Smith's use of cultural sources to support his claims about popular opinion or national myths is an important feature of his analysis. All too often, when discussing national identity, myth or memory, historians base their arguments on assumptions about what British people thought or felt, without offering any evidence to support such claims. Throughout this text Smith draws on a rich tapestry of primary material: from poetry to political speeches, from cinema to cartoons.

Dunkirk, the Battle of Britain, the Blitz – these 'totemic' (p.4) terms produced powerful images of Britishness and guided Britain's homefront and international policies in the postwar world. All are examined carefully by Smith to assess how they reflected, and influenced, class politics, gender relations, political consensus, the relationship between nation and state, and Britain's world role. The 1945 Labour victory, suggests Smith, can be attributed to its successful mobilisation of images of 1940 and, in an intriguing chapter, 'Refighting the War: Attlee to Blair', Smith traces the appropriation of '1940' in Britain's postwar political discourse. For every dominant myth there are many counter-myths – they are never static or homogeneous – and, as Smith points out, 'there were always major differences of emphasis *within* the myth' (p.111, emphasis added). Asking why certain images endure, albeit in constantly shifting forms, and what cultural or political purpose they serve in the present, is an intriguing question. Smith's book not only emphasises the importance of this question but also encourages the reader to ponder it themselves.

TRACY MCDIARMID
University of Western Australia