

Gordon and Michael faded into the background, surviving only in those readings which accorded to what Ackland calls "the needs and perceptions of succeeding generations." Nationalism in masculine dress accounted for some of the diminution of these male poets and for almost all the neglect of the women writers beyond one or two like Gilmore, who seemed to be selected to represent the female voice of Australia.

When Leon Cantrell edited *The 1890s: Stories, Verse and Essays* in 1977 the inclusion of Mary Gilmore as the sole woman poet, and Miles Franklin, Louisa Lawson and Barbara Baynton as the only women prose writers was thought adequate by most academics using the collection. Few then possessed the political or socio-literary theory to analyse any disquiet they had about the sparse representation of women. Our expanded understanding of women writers in less than two decades encourages us to think forwards to the kinds of new enlightenment that wait in the future. Meanwhile, *The Time to Write* and *That Shining Band* are informative and thoughtful additions to current knowledge and perceptions.

Delys Bird

## WOMEN AND AUSTRALIAN CULTURE BETWEEN THE WARS

Maryanne Dever (ed). *Wallflowers and Witches*. St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1994, pb., 174 pp. ISBN 0 7022 2607 6.

In her introduction to this very competently edited collection of essays on various topics to do with women's cultural life in the early decades of twentieth-century Australia, Maryanne Dever begins by accounting for and justifying her collection. Although there is now widespread acknowledgment that women made major contributions to Australian culture in that period, Dever argues that there has been little examination of the "particular cultural and ideological shifts underpinning this development."

The essays in the collection, then, represent just such theoretical examinations both of less-than-celebrated individual women, such as artists Thea Proctor and Ethel Carrick Fox, sculptor Eleonore Lange, writers Dulcie Deamer, Dymphna Cusack, "Margaret Fane," M. Barnard Eldershaw and Katharine Susannah Prichard, and of relatively neglected areas of, and influences on, women's cultural production, such as the Sydney Society of Women Painters; modernism and its effects; women's diary writing and so on.

Dever's project is thus represented by her as "an attempt to rethink some of the fundamental conceptual models used to analyse women's relationship to cultural production, particularly in Australia's interwar years," itself an under-researched period. As well as having a valuable introduction, which gives a concise background to the ways women's cultural history has been written, and argues persuasively for approaches that contextualise analyses, recognising the complexity of the gendered circumstances in which women work creatively, the book comprises a number of essays by both female and male writers. Each contribution is based on original research, written in a lively and accessible style and illuminating in its theoretical approach. It also has a quite extensive group of good black and white illustrations, and a list of "References" that brings together all the works referred to in the essays. While it is necessarily very eclectic, that eclecticism is itself valuable, making it very different from the usual "Bibliography."

While edited collections of essays can be dubious propositions, often uneven and brought together under the most spurious of conditions, as I've already indicated, these essays are uniformly of a very high standard, providing both interesting reading and challenging insights into their topics as well as into the historical period of the collection. They exist too as valuable records of fascinating research. In all these ways, the book is a useful addition to what is still quite

a small body of work in specific areas of Australian culture.

Reviewing collections, too, can be dodgy. It is impossible to do justice to all of the parts of the whole; even to mention all the contributors. My solution will be to refer to those of particular interest to me, while emphasising the rewards the collection as a whole will bring to a range of readers. In one exemplary interweaving of a literary woman's personal and professional lives, contemporary cultural influence and problematical relationship to recognition and reward in her own time and later, Michael Sharkey writes on "Recuperating 'Margaret Fane'," tracing Beatrice Florence Osborn's extraordinary story. Described as being "unconventional in putting a creative life ahead of prevailing codes relating to the rearing of children and domestic arrangements," Osborn nevertheless bore seven children although she never married; was a prolific, diverse and popular writer in her productive years, and was part of Sydney's bohemian artistic community in the 1920s, '30s and '40s. She died in obscurity. Sharkey's placing of Osborn's life in relation to its social and literary contexts emphasises its difference; for him, "its interest lies precisely in its departures from pattern."

An interest in what lies outside the paradigms into which explanations of women's relationship to cultural production are so often fitted

characterises all these essays. Maryanne Dever suggests that the inter-war period was itself a flexible one, within which "[T]he task of the writer in Australia ...could be said to have been one of ... effectively reinventing themselves in terms of a national cultural imperative." She discusses the ways Marjorie Barnard and Flora Eldershaw, the two writers who published a range of writing using the pseudonym "M. Barnard Eldershaw," positioned themselves as "a man of letters". Julie Wells examines how perceptions of communist women writers represented them as "Red Witches," a representation that "bear[s] witness to the very real challenges which their work and lives posed to dominant ideas about women, politics and sexuality."

Women's letters are now recognised as part of literary discourse; Carole Ferrier refers to the way memory is constituted in the letters of six Australian women novelists over a thirty year period from the early 1930s. The significance of women's diaries as "an important precursory literary genre" in which contemporary readers can trace the "nuances of women's words" and of women's concerns is the subject of Katie Holmes's piece. Most of these essays suggest that while the representation of the masculine "genius" allowed a range of departures from what was accepted as conventional male behaviour, no such allowances were available to women who dared to live modern, creative lives between the

wars. Hence, again, the essays convey the strategies such women had to resort to in order to achieve, in the most limited sense in relation to the freedoms allowed their male contemporaries, some measure of independence and fulfilment.

These and many other preoccupations are the subjects of this collection. It offers both individual interest in a series of riveting essays and an overall story of aspects of women and culture in Australia between 1910 and 1945.

20