

in which Donald Sinden's aggressively funny Benedick and Judi Dench's deeply-felt Beatrice were brilliant individual performances that had no connection with each other. A much better balance was struck in 1980, by Derek Jacobi, who followed a lead initiated but not developed by Gielgud, making Benedick a "new sensitive man" (168) who wouldn't strike conventional male poses, and Sinead Cusack, whose Beatrice was "an emotionally isolated person, using her wit as defence against being hurt" (170).

Much Ado has also had a woman director, Di Trevis, who in 1988 set the play in the 1950s, in an outpost of the vanishing Empire. Gay tries to rescue her production from the critical drubbing it received by appealing to the evidence of the archive videotape. She does her best for it, but having seen the production I would have to agree for once with the reviewers. Whatever Trevis's feelings about the play, the production conveyed a strong dislike of the characters and their society, not earned by working through the relationships but externally imposed by the device of transporting the play to a world that was easy to despise. The result was generalised and externalised, and not clearly related to the comedy of the play or to questions like, what do Beatrice and Benedick want from each other, and why should we care? For all the value of a committed social perspective, you still have to do the work. As Gay's study shows, the production history of these plays at

Stratford includes a heartening number of artists who have done just that, opening out the plays through taking the chances the plays themselves offer, challenging the preconceptions of the audiences, and sometimes of the productions themselves. The actresses of the '40s emerge with particular credit here, as do more recent performers like Sinead Cusack, Juliet Stevenson and Susan Fleetwood. But Gay also shows that progress has been anything but steady, and there has been of late some alarming back-sliding. Her book chronicles, with urgency and eloquence, an ongoing struggle.

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Elizabeth Perkins

CULTURAL CAPITAL RECLAIMED FOR FUTURE INVESTMENT

Kay Ferres, ed, *The Time to Write: Australian Women Writers 1890-1930*, Penguin Books, Ringwood, 1993. 280 pp. RRP \$17.95. ISBN 0 14 013917 6.

Michael Ackland, *That Shining Band: A Study of Australian Colonial Verse Tradition*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1994. 243 pp. RRP \$29.95. ISBN 0 7022 2686 6.

These texts add two more to the solidly impressive collection of work by and about nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century writers which has appeared over the last decade,

and which includes new manuscripts, reprints and critical commentary, reinforcing material available for students and researchers. The aim stated in Ackland's Preface is "to restore to Australians a vital and forgotten part of their cultural heritage," and this is certainly the effect of these publications. They do more than offer us a static cultural heritage to be gazed at between book covers. The visions, aspirations, hopes, achievements and failures represented in the work of these writers have the potential to nourish and vitalise Australian cultural life in the last decade of this century. The critical commentary, which includes social and political contextualising and literary appreciation, demonstrates that these original texts strike us as significant when we come to deal with the hopes and fears of our own time. This is especially apparent in women's writing and commentary, making a close reading of the twelve essays in *The Time to Write* more than just an academic experience.

Scholarly attention to the development of nationalism, trades unionism and class issues in Australia, given impetus by Palmer's *The Legend of the Nineties* (1954) and Ward's *The Australian Legend* (1958), has overshadowed what Ferres calls the feminised decades between 1900 and 1930 and, as she says, has muffled its feminine voices. *A Time to Write* intends "to bring the process of feminisation of Australian culture out of the shadows of bush nationalism." The essays do this, but not because

the voices of male culture were suppressed or ignored by the women who are the subjects, in the way that masculine enterprises usually render female culture invisible. In their writing they presented a diverse and detailed picture of the private and public lives of women, and the essays in *The Time to Write* also show where male or patriarchal culture simply shaped the context of women's lives and where it became a pressing restriction. Revising our notions about women's lives in rural and urban settings is a cheerful challenge: it is impossible to leave these studies without feeling admiration and hope, even when the earlier writer felt herself trapped by social restrictions, or the later commentator points out the concealed entrapment which, from our point of view, may have been inadequately questioned.

Ackland's *That Shining Band* takes Barron Field, Charles Harpur, Henry Kendall, Adam Lindsay Gordon and James Lionel Michael as central figures, but also discusses the poetry of women like Emma Anderson, Ada Cambridge, Eliza Dunlop, Emily Manning, Catherine Spence and Mary Hannay Foott. Ackland cites Dorothy Mermin's suggestion as to why some of these women concentrated on novels even when they had an obvious poetic gift: "Publication seemed unwomanly self-display, or even sexual self-exposure, and could be justified more easily if one wrote novels to make money rather than poems just for glory." The poems of the Sydney artist Adelaide Ironside

(1831–1867), published in journals, are not mentioned in Ackland's discussions, but they are typical in many ways of the defiant spirit necessary for women who dared to publish poetry and to tackle themes beyond domestic and social concern.

That Shining Band, a quotation from Kendall's memorial poem for "The Late Mr A. L. Gordon," referred to colonial poets like Harpur, Gordon, Michael and himself who bore both the glory and the curse of the "Poet's twofold life." Although, as Ackland demonstrates, the poetry of these men reveals conventionally limited notions of women, Ackland's own discussion indicates that perhaps the self-identity of a woman poet in the nineteenth century was even more deeply layered than that of her male counterpart. *That Shining Band* includes several quotations which make contemporary readers gasp, but perhaps most incredible is Ruskin's accusation in 1864 that women are answerable for all the war and injustice in the world because they have not prevented it: "There is no suffering, no injustice, no misery in the earth, but the guilt of it lies with you. Men can bear the sight of it, but you should not be able to bear it."

If ideas like Ruskin's did influence the latter nineteenth century as Ackland argues, it adds to our understanding of the problems of identity, duty, morality and conscience which troubled the women discussed in both these texts. Henry Handel Richardson, Mary Gilmore and Rosa Praed, for

example, who appear in several essays, were perplexed but not daunted by the task of making sense of a masculinist universe and woman's place in it and their constructions of women in their novels are often realistic, deeply ironic and not infrequently, subversively hopeful. Given the political and comparatively physical impotence of women, it is significant that theosophy, whose basic premise that physical energy can be transmuted into psychic energy appealed strongly to Praed, Richardson, Katharine Susannah Prichard and to the lesser known Mary Moore Bentley. Bentley's "eutopian" *A Woman of Mars, or Australia's Enfranchised Woman* (1901) is compared with Helen Simpson's *The Woman on the Beast* (1933) in an informative essay by Gillian Whitlock. If the responsibility for arresting the destructive tendencies of humankind lies entirely on women, psychic energy seems to be their only practical instrument.

The Time to Write presents a variety of approaches and readings in which the most seasoned Aust. Lit. reader will find something new, as, for example, Hanne Bock's discussion of the influence of the *Jugend* writers and the novels of the Norwegian Amalie Skram on Richardson, or Kerry M. White's analysis of the work of Ethel and Lilian Turner, Mary Grant Bruce, Louise Mack and others in terms of "family" novels attempting to construct ideal or alternative roles for young women. The importance of what Marilyn Lake in 1986 called "the

politics of respectability" is demonstrated in the useful discussions by Helen Thomson ("Gardening in the Never-Never"), Joy Hooton on Mary Fullerton, Susan Martin on Miles Franklin, and Gillian Whitlock.

The politics and social legislation of the period 1890-1930, as experienced by women, are clarified and contextualised in Sharyn Pearce's account of Gilmore's journalism, Sandra Burchill's essay throwing new light on Prichard's writing career, and Kay Ferres's discussion of "the sex problem" dealt with in representative Praed work. The sex problem is also one focus of Rosemary Moore's sensitive account of Mollie Skinner, and is carefully explicated in Rosemary Moore's analysis of Barbara Baynton's novel *Human Toll*. It is consoling to see that men also had some sex problems. If women had responsibility for reforming humankind, men were responsible for conserving the wherewithal to maintain Australiankind: "Semen was a national resource with a vital part to play in the creation of future generations, an essential ingredient of national greatness. It followed that seminal loss foreshadowed national decline. Masturbation, therefore, was unpatriotic and unAustralian" (Whitlock citing David Walker "Continence for a nation. Seminal loss and national vigour" 1985).

The highmindedness and aspirations of the poets who appear in *That Shining Band* preclude sexual concern, although continence of different kinds

was sought but often eluded each of the male poets. Ackland has earlier written extensively on Harpur and Kendall and in this study he looks closely at the ways in which essentially sensitive men like Harpur, Kendall, Gordon and Michael struggled to adapt their instinctive idealism to their social, political and intellectual universe. From the convict poet Michael Massey Robinson to politician-poets William Charles Wentworth and Henry Parkes, and high-souled visionaries like Harpur and Kendall, the male poets were acutely conscious that, whatever their themes, their role as writers was to create an Australian tradition of literature.

The kinds of dedication Gilmore and Lesbia Harford gave to poetry receive fresh emphasis in Jennifer Strauss's "Stubborn Singers of the Full Song" in *The Time to Write*, and their intentions invite comparison with those of Emily Manning (1845-1890) whose verse, Ackland suggests, demonstrates "the formal, thematic and intellectual constriction placed on the female poet together with some of the strategies available for their circumvention." More questioning revision of the role of women is seen in the lesser known poems of Emma Anderson, whose *Colonial Poems* (1869) deserve further attention, as does the work of other women brought back into the critical light in *This Shining Band*.

As Australian nationalism developed towards the end of the nineteenth century, the work of Harpur, Kendall,

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.