

We are all born of enthusiasm. As we grow, maturity gradually becomes synonymous with control, movement equals achievement and life becomes less enthralling. The question of whether or not the poems in these collections have been able to strike a "magical" balance between enthusiasm and control is, ultimately, less important than recognising their ability to rekindle, and rebalance, these same qualities in the reader. This is the poetry that touches, that traverses the jaded terrain of everyday to ignite a spontaneous personal déjà-vu.

Lynda McCaffery

A FEW MORSELS

McKenzie Wark, *Celebrities, Culture and Cyberspace: the Light on the Hill in a Postmodern World*. Pluto Press, Sydney, 1999. ISBN: 1 86403 045 3

Politics as a whole becomes just a branch of the media and species of celebrity, and as such has to compete on unfavourable terms with other kinds of media image and story. (221)

Celebrities, Culture and Cyberspace: the Light on the Hill in a Postmodern World, takes as its focus the shifting

positions of the Australian Labor Party since ca. 1960. McKenzie Wark examines not only the party's policy shifts but he looks at the way the Australian Labor Party's fortunes have been played out—and organized through—the media "vectors" of the same period.

During his lifetime, the author has obviously experienced a shift in his own political philosophy. He says, "I used to be a true believer, and a labour movement leftist, but these days I've lost faith in anything but the practicalities of forming electoral majorities out of a commitment to minimizing what Bob Ellis calls 'avoidable suffering'." (181)

According to Wark, any political force seeking power must acknowledge the connections between celebrity, culture and politics. These he says are "the images through which people formulate what they want, the resources and practices they have for acting on those wants, and the vectors along which the information connecting the former to the latter travels." (327) And it is Wark's contention that political movements must, at least to some extent, manipulate that connection.

Media "vectors" such as the printing press, broadcasting, telephony, and the internet are in a state of flux. Political parties must adjust their tactics accordingly in order to capture the popular imagination of various electorates. And the population must also undergo a struggle either to

accommodate, or resist, the changing nature of Australia's cultural and media industries, which are in turn subject to globalization through cyberspace.

Celebrity, Culture and Cyberspace is divided into these three thematic sections. The first is wholly unsatisfying, particularly as it fails to sufficiently address the issue of "the light on the hill" in ways which would connect it thematically with the rest of the book. The latter two sections are however rich with insights: Wark tackles the intricacies of Australia's social nature and growing media-savvy; he examines Labor's performers during their time in office, behind the scenes and beyond. He looks at the so-called antagonism between the Boomers and Generation X—the "generationalism" espoused variously by social researcher Hugh Mackay, and Mark Davis in *Ganglands*; and the political offerings of the ALP's Lindsay Tanner on the the party's "left" and Mark Latham of the "right."

Celebrity, Culture and Cyberspace holds up to scrutiny Hawke's love-affair with the media and his approach to policy, and contrasts that with Keating's, to great effect. Barry Jones' contributions to the scene, his intellectual and gentle nature, also come under the spotlight.

The author's efforts to account for the differences in Australia between "the bush," the "suburbs" and (his

own) urban(e) groupings is much less convincing. No more so than when he reassures us that he cannot step outside his urbane, Ultimo, black-clad, information-rich, world of Chardonnay in order to "know" properly the experience of the "others."

In *Celebrities, Culture & Cyberspace* Wark strings together almost everything he's ever written about pop stars, Australian culture, the political machinations of the so-called "left" wing of the political spectrum, and the media. It is therefore, an ambitious book, which elevates the foci of his urbane Sydney lifestyle to the status of objects of political analysis. I don't think Natalie Imbruglia's hair style, or Peter Garrett's lack of one, say anything salient about the Labor party's time in the spotlight or their exit from centre-stage. But Wark clearly does, indifferently. He finds significance in all performances, celebrities, and media texts from *Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* to Nick Cave and his Birthday Party.

In his effort to examine a new way for the ALP, Wark leaves us with this:

If there is a "third way" for social democracy, it is I think a practical but not pragmatic, reasoned but not rationalist, radical but not utopian practice of experimenting with the given elements and events of everyday life. (339)

I'm sorry, what? That sounds more like a prescription for recreational drug use.

Perhaps this is more transparent:

The agenda for Labor beyond 2000 is clear: it has to spread the cultural and economic benefits of cyberspace. This is Labor's problem: to make itself the power that might broker the interests of the information proletariat. (255-256)

Here's a recommendation—if you are going to “do” this book, don't do it in analogue; go digital and apply the hyperlink approach: bounce around, pick and choose sections to taste and enjoy the few morsels that work for you.



Marie-France Mack

GIVING FORTH NEW SEED

Marion Campbell, *Prowler*, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1999. ISBN 186368251-1

For those who are familiar with Marion Campbell's first two novels, *Lines of Flight*, 1985, and *Not being Miriam*, 1988, reading her latest, *Prowler*, is like a second visit to an archaeological dig. There, the visitor

might have appreciated the beauty of what had been uncovered then. With *Prowler* the visitor is confronted by many other shrines, excavated since the first visit, all displaying familiar features and a wealth of new signs to explore. For those who haven't had the chance to read any of Campbell's work, *Prowler* is a novel difficult to put away once you start reading, though it is not a novel that can be read quickly for it deals with the deepest questions of modern Australia and the malaise of global culture. Yet it opens the way to possible solutions and hope for a better world.

On the surface the story in the body of the text is simple: Lou Barb, a university academic, is given her friend Tom-Tom's notebooks by Maurice, Tom-Tom's second husband. Maurice is upset, not only because his wife has just died, but also because he does not recognize himself in her notes, making him feel that he is losing her a second time. The novel alternates between the narration of Lou Barb and excerpts from Tom-Tom's notebooks. Lou tries to understand Tom-Tom's story and her own. And Tom-Tom, now dead, seems to change her life more drastically than when alive. Lou Barb receives two letters from her school friend, Odette, which are also part of the text.

Prowler should appeal to those who enjoy an intellectual read and those who are touched by the poetry of the discourse, those who have suffered