

Marjorie Gilmore

## CAUGHT IN TIME

Bill Bunbury, *Caught in Time*  
Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre  
Press, 2006. ISBN 1 92106 484 6

In the plethora of Australian history, it is refreshing to find a book which is almost entirely dependant on the authentic voices of active participants to place the narrative within the time-frame of larger historical events. Bill Bunbury's book is a testament to the endurance and adaptability of people caught in events not of their own making.

The book records ten episodes in the evolution of the nation of Australia, starting with a Dutch shipwreck and ending with the reconciliation of Indigenous Australians and a group of white farmers in a region of Western Australia. In between are the histories of men and women driven by religion, war, natural disasters and the need for collective action to claim justice for themselves and others. While the events in themselves are but a footnote to the larger history of nation creation, they vividly illustrate the way that people manage their immediate responses, as well as their long-term adjustment to circumstances. The whole narrative is more than the sum of its parts in that it provides snapshots which produce an historical tapestry of Australia's development as a cultural entity.

The first chapter deals with the discovery of a wreck of a Dutch trading vessel which foundered on the coast of Western Australia in about 1713, and subsequent attempts to preserve it and associated artifacts as part of Australia's heritage. The narrative details the altruistic efforts of those charged with the retrieval and preservation of the artifacts, as well as the entirely profit-driven attempts others to grab as much treasure as they could. It also speculates on the part played by Aboriginal people in the survival of the ship's crew.

Still on the theme of altruism versus the profit motive, the following chapters outline the difficulties of missionaries to alleviate the slave-like conditions under which Aboriginal people were forced to work in the pastoral industry. Similarly, through the voices of men and women who were there, Bunbury offers a foretaste of the "Patricks Solution" to breaking down the resolve of wharfies caught between vested interests and the Spanish Flu in the 1920s. He also deals with the struggle of working men to gain justice for themselves and their families when working in the phosphate mines of Christmas Island, when under the monopoly control of a single company and a distant government. The difficulties of farmers and others in establishing small farms are also documented through the stories of one man's attempt to establish a dried fruit business in Victoria and Western Australia.

The effects of war on both civilians and military personnel are brought vividly to life in the exploits of men and women dealing with events which required ingenuity and endurance. In the same vein, people's reactions to natural disasters are chronicled in the first hand experiences of encountered in a small community hit by a devastating earthquake in the 1960s. The narratives of migrants are also recorded, with an emphasis on the difficulties of establishing a sense of identity in a foreign culture. The book ends with the experiences of two sets of people with a common love of the land coming together to develop mutual respect and understanding.

This book uses the direct experiences of participants to convey the sweep of Australia's history to a larger audience. It is essentially a "peoples' book," and certainly not an academic tome. It is a highly recommended read for those interested in the motivations and actions of ordinary people dealing with extraordinary times, and perhaps contributing to the course of history as it has unfolded in this country.



Noela McNamara

## TELL THE BLACK WATER & THE PEOPLE SINGERS

Terry Yates, *Tell the Black Water, From the Mud to the Stars* -, 2005.  
ISBN 0-646-45294-0

In disregard of the obvious rules of more traditional poetry, Terry Yates' poetic voice wanders rebelliously amongst an imagery of people, places, and events. His poetry dips and dives, slips and slides in the way of modern poetry overcoming its struggle to find a form which adequately expresses his thoughts on paper. His mentors (by his own admission) are diverse — from Keats to Kerouac.

In "Source Work" he questions Keats' sources whilst reflecting on his own:

He looked for ways to compare his joy  
and chose from breakthroughs of his day  
like someone choosing a dancing partner –  
Was it a case of a blindfold pick  
Or did the final partners easily self impose?  
(53)

Similarly Yates' "Letter to Jack" expresses the lasting affect of Jack Kerouac's words:

**In some big world way Jack, you**  
turned me loose;  
your stories held things a country kid  
could hitch to. (23)

Yates' poetry accentuates the point that poetry can be good irrespective of