

identity. On the one hand, she feels at home and seduced by her new and exotic world, which is exemplified by her affair with Aaron, a Papuan national; on the other, her betrayal of her European husband, coupled with the rejection she encounters by Aaron's family, leaves her fragmented, and ultimately, silenced. Rika's painful experiences in this new place highlight the difficulties this nation faces in a hybrid environment where Western mores and values interface with traditional ones.

The novel is divided into two books; the first covers the years from 1968-73, and the second, from 2005-2006. This division reflects how the country has been divided into two distinct eras: colonisation and post colonisation. The first book centres on the tumultuous years leading up to Papua New Guinea's independence from Australian governance, and the main themes are betrayal and fragmentation. Book two has a more sombre tone, and the loose ends left from the previous book begin to come together through Jericho, Rika and Aaron's adopted son, who is the biological son of Rika's ex-husband Leonard, and Janape, a woman from a tribe on the Mountain. Jericho, having left Papua New Guinea thirty years previously, is desperate to feel a sense of synergy with his birthplace despite the fact that he has a European father and has spent much time in Europe. Therefore, the main theme in this section is identity formation.

The novel is a hefty read and a tad slow at the start, but do persist as the impression the novel leaves you with is well worth the initial effort, and the sense of place Modjeska portrays affects a ruminative response, and displays her skill as a novelist.



DAMNED

Reviewed by Molly Hoey

Palahniuk, Chuck. *Damned*. London: Vintage, 2012. ISBN 9780099552598. RRP \$19.95. pp.256.

Chuck Palahniuk has always had the ability to polarise critics. He is labeled by some as a cult leader and black humor messiah and by others as a hackneyed pulp author with a penchant for shock value.

Palahniuk's 2012 work *Damned*, the first installment in a series of three, centers around Madison Spencer, who is 13, and dead. The book follows her as she attempts to traverse a landscape of discarded bodily fluids and come to terms with her premature damnation. Each chapter is headed with an allusion to Judy Blume's *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret*, except in *Damned* the opener exchanges God and Margaret for Madison and Satan himself. The rest of the chapters are Madison's direct addresses to the reader as she explores Hell. Her conclusion? Death, just like life, is what you make it. *Damned*

is Palahniuk's interpretation of the Bildungsroman, albeit a dead one, which explains why it has none of the sinew and stench of *Haunted* and lacks the neo-mysticism of *Rant* or *Lullaby*. Whilst it is an attempt at another popular genre (Palahniuk has previously tackled numerous genres from horror to celebrity confessional), it maintains Palahniuk's insistence on humor and his own brand of misanthropic romanticism. So, no, this is not one of the greatest pieces of literature of all time. It is arguably not even Palahniuk's best work, but it is a funny, approachable kind of book, a gross and flippant escape from some of the more serious elements of life and literature, and that is, after all, what we all need from time to time.

However, it is understandable why even some Palahniuk fans have baulked at it. Perhaps the greatest frustration in this novel is that it doesn't really explore any of the ideas it addresses, and there are many. It broaches death without any real fear or fascination, makes claims of metafictional reflexivity but doesn't follow through with them, and deals with all its subject matter in the same emotionless monotone. It could be argued that this 'lightness' is intentional because of the narrator's age and the text's emphasis on parody, but many of the ideas are not seen through to their thought provoking, or gut wrenching, potential. Using the reflexive nature of the novel in a more productive way would have allowed the text to offer more than a superficial glance at mortality, creation and purpose.

Another criticism is the narrative voice. It could be argued that Madison's voice is

purposefully constructed as irritating and misguidedly confrontational but on many occasions this doesn't lead to any revelation of character, it simply isolates the reader, and not in the way that is intended. For example, Madison repeatedly accuses the reader of feeling superior to her because she's dead and they're still alive:

Probably I shouldn't even tell you I'm dead, because no doubt now you feel awfully superior. Even other fat people feel superior to dead people. Nevertheless, here it is: my Hideous Admission. I'll fess up and come clean. I'm out of the closet. I'm dead. Now don't hold it against me (3).

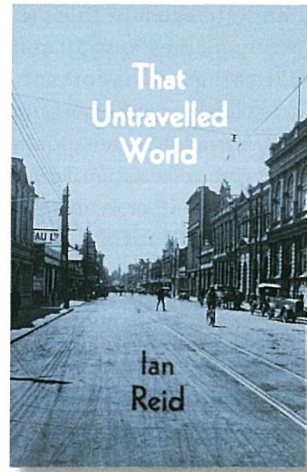
But rather than confronting the reader as a revealing accusation, this just becomes irksome because it in no way reflects what the reader is actually thinking. There is also a notable lack of character development. It's true that these last points could be defended by the idea that it's intended to be a parody, but there is always the feeling that the characters could have benefitted from being more developed.

Despite this, all of these failings do not stop the book from achieving its goal, which has always been to make us think a bit and laugh a lot. And so, in many ways, it can be forgiven its trespasses.

Palahniuk's imagining of hell with its telemarketing and candy-currency is often laugh-out-loud funny. Madison is written with a sense of love and affection, and many of the images and metaphors are surprisingly beautiful. Many a moment is genuinely funny and touching; a

particularly poignant and haunting scene happens while Madison is still alive, hiding out in her empty private school and exploring nudity and fantasy, padding barefoot and breathless through the corridors evading mirages of masculinity.

So no, it is no great exposition of the nature of mortality, authorship, youth or sin, but then again Palahniuk never claimed it was. Palahniuk's onus on romanticism through horror has been maintained. What is so enjoyable about Palahniuk is that no matter how much you pick apart his work, you can't help but enjoy it. And surely there is some beauty in that. I guess Palahniuk novels are like most other kinds of fetishism: if it makes you happy and isn't hurting anyone, then what is all the fuss about?



THAT UNTRAVELLED WORLD

Reviewed by Victoria Kuttainen

Reid, Ian. *That Untravelled World*. Crawley: University of Western Australia Press, 2012. ISBN 978-1-74258-396-9 RRP \$24.95. pp.214.

That Untravelled World is the second novel by Perth-based author and academic Ian Reid. His acclaimed first novel, *The End of Longing*, was published by UWAP in 2011. As the Winthrop Professor at the University of Western Australia and Emeritus Professor at Curtin University, Reid has branched into creative work—including historical fiction, non-fiction, and poetry—but his first and most distinguished career was as an academic and professor of literature. I first encountered Reid the academic, as a literary historian of the interwar period, through his now classic *Fiction and the Great Depression in Australian and New Zealand* (Edward Arnold, 1979). Like