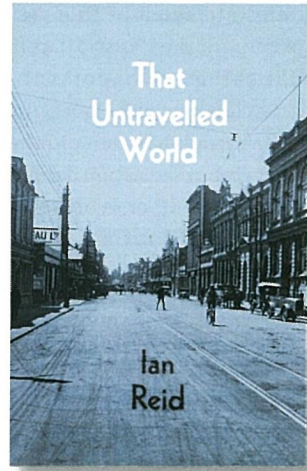


particularly poignant and haunting scene happens while Madison is still alive, hiding out in her empty private school and exploring nudity and fantasy, padding barefoot and breathless through the corridors evading mirages of masculinity.

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

Reid, I am interested in this critically overlooked period of Australian history and publishing, so important to its modern development, yet often eclipsed by studies of Australian fiction of other eras that loom larger in the national imaginary: the 1890s, Gallipoli, or World War Two and after. As Reid turns to fiction to explore this period in his novel *That Untravelled World*, I find in it rich opportunities to contemplate alternatives to the nationalist bush-centred narratives of Australian history and literature. For these reasons, Reid the writer has now also captured my attention.

There are other reasons I turned to this book that are also worth mentioning as a prelude to this review. Reid is one of the few academics of literary studies who has managed to cross to the other side of literary academic work to publish creative writing, and this has been a long suppressed ambition of my own, too. While there was a time when creative writing and literary studies partnered, the separation of writing from criticism has now been long entrenched. New Criticism came to dominate literary studies by the 1960s, and then even newer poststructuralist frames of interpretation became increasingly distanced from the more essential and basic concerns about image, metaphor and craft, which preoccupy writers. The professionalisation of Creative Writing formalised the separation as Schools like Iowa developed the studio method of work-shopping creative writing quite separate from the work of critical analysis. Yet as demand for more vocationally driven courses swells, English departments and Arts faculties are now re-accommodating subjects in

creative writing to supplement their core offerings in the humanities. Those of us who made careers in literary analysis are now, by force of student demand, being asked to staff creative writing subjects. For some of us, this is an opportunity to consider our long abandoned dreams of creative writing. And while there are rewards in doing so, as other writers who began their careers as literary scholars have long discovered—Margaret Atwood, Francine Prose and Gail Jones are just three successful examples of many—others like me are finding out just how hard it is to cross that great divide.

I turned to this book for two reasons, then. I wanted to know how Ian Reid managed to capture that interwar era—the Australia on the cusp of modernity that so fascinates me, an Australia awash with bright promises of modernity and abuzz with the new technologies of communications and transport: radio, cinema, motorcars, and leisure. *That Untravelled World* bursts in the optimism of the period before the Depression, and Reid's main character Harry Hopewell, aptly named, sets this period alight. Reid manages to capture the period's faith in progress and technology exceptionally well, and to illuminate Western Australia in these years even more so. Ingeniously creating a character who is an engineer on the Appletown radio tower, Reid creates in Hopewell an emblem not only of the era's hope in the promises of modernity, but also the feeling of a region connected to the whole, tuned in to the rest of Australia and the world.

But to the other reason I turned to this book—because I was curious about how a former literary critic turned creative

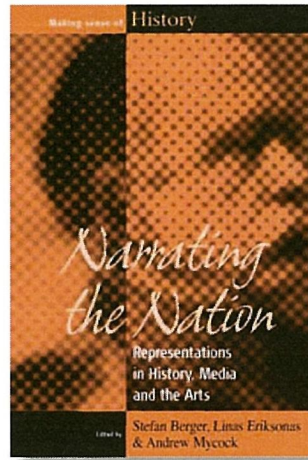
writer would do... on this count, I am afraid that the criticism I have been so trained in extolling as a literary critic is an old habit that dies hard. As someone who has spent a fair amount of time in the archives of the twenties and thirties, I recognised many of the era's landmarks around which Reid tours his reader: *The Australian Women's Weekly*, Katharine Susannah Prichard and Bert Hinkley, to name just a few. But there is a sense that the archival tour is the core of the novel: that, perhaps, Reid the academic uncovered so many fascinating stories in his own career of research that this novel is forced to do the work for Reid the writer of absorbing all his anecdotal academic left-overs. A weak plot device attempts to redeem the novel from languishing at the level of historical anecdote—Harry Hopewell's girlfriend Nellie mysteriously goes missing, along with her whole family, just when their courtship is starting to get interesting. But the aborted romance and the mystery around it is not enough to pull the reader through the peripatetic albeit picturesque tour of the Great Depression and its aftermath. And there is a further sense that Reid's interests in labour history, unionism, and poverty over-emphasise the doom and gloom of this period, creating an exaggerated contrast with the hopefulness of the decade immediately before the Great Crash and its aftermath, as if to illustrate a pet theory of Reid's. Strange plot twists, such as Hopewell's bicycle injury and a friend's suicide, seem forced attempts at narrative drive, when the heart of this novel is its picaresque exploration of the Australian interwar archive. I wanted to like this novel, and many aspects of it fascinated me as an academic, but I found it less

appealing to the general reader. For those readers with an interest in the interwar period, its fictionalisation of the historical record and Australia's social history is interesting, but I'm not sure that's enough to make this novel a good read.

Perhaps this is sour grapes from a stifled academic who wishes she could write only half as well as Reid does in this ambitious novel, but it is also a cautionary tale that stories from the archive—as fascinating as they might read as anecdotes—do not a novel make. Harry Hopewell spends far too much of this novel alone and in his own head. The work of good fiction, in which life appears to splash out from the page, often requires characters and their writers to venture out a bit more from the library and into the deep-end of life. Hopewell needs to engage more actively with the life of the heart instead of the head, and more substantially with other people. Reid portrays his main character as a loner—isolated, impoverished, and broken-hearted, obsessed with the idea of a woman whose incandescent memory of first love eclipses his ability to engage in any relationship. Creating a novel around these character traits may successfully personify the broken dreams of an era of lost innocence and hope, but it does not successfully launch a character, at least not a sympathetic one who engages the reader.

At their essence, I think, successful well-told stories remain people-centred, rather than driven by ideas or ideologies. As a young student of literature my two (oddly inconsonant) favourite books were Ayn Rand's *The Fountainhead* and John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*. I loved Rand's fiction for the way it mapped ideas

onto characters and stories; and I loved Steinbeck's novel for its compassion for people whose tragically beautiful and messy lives over-spilled ideology and short-sighted thinking. Over the years, Steinbeck has remained a favourite for me, while my patience for ideology has worn thin. Reid's latest novel seems a bit more inclined toward camp Rand, even if its ideologies and sympathies lean to the left instead of the right. At a short 214 pages, it's worth the quick read it is, but at much longer it wouldn't hold a reader, academic or otherwise.



## NARRATING THE NATION: REPRESENTATIONS IN HISTORY, MEDIA AND THE ARTS

Reviewed by Elizabeth Ellison

Berger, Stefan, Linas Eriksonas, and Andrew Mycock, eds. *Narrating the Nation: Representations in History, Media and the Arts*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2011. ISBN 9780857451736. RRP \$95. pp.348.

*Narrating the Nation* is number 11 in a series titled 'Making Sense of History', published by Berghahn Books. It is an edited collection that examines representations of nationhood through a variety of media, including literature, film, art and music. The collection emerged from a conference organised as part of a five-year program, 'Representations of the Past: The Writing of National Histories in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Europe' (NIHST). The focus is primarily on national narrative, and the way it can